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OF

THOMAS SECKER, LL.D.

LATE LORD ARCHBISHOP OF CANTERBURY.

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A

REVIEW OF

HIS GRACE'S LIFE AND CHARACTER,

BY BEILBY PORTEUS, D.D.

LATE LORD BISHOP OF LONDON.

A NEW EDITION,

IN SIX VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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SERMON I.

PROV. ix. 10.

THE FEAR OF THE LORD IS THE BEGINNING OF WISDOM: AND THE KNOWLEDGE OF THE HOLY IS UNDERSTANDING.

WE all naturally desire happiness: we all know, that obtaining it greatly depends on a wise choice of our conduct in life: and yet very few examine, with any care, what conduct is likeliest to procure us the felicity that we seek. The livelier part of the world, hurried along by a giddy tumult of passions and fancies, venture, with a most intrepid gaiety of heart, on whatever looks pleasing to them: and are in much too great haste for present gratification, ever to stay and once think what may be the consequences, either to others, or even to themselves. The good-natured and flexible are easily drawn to follow the more active and enterprising of their acquaintance; and the thoughtless and indolent find it unspeakably the least trouble to let themselves be born along by the tide of custom and fashion, just as it flows and ebbs by turns. Yet surely reason doth not make part of our nature for no purpose: nor experience discover any thing more plainly, than the numberless miseries that proceed from going on thus at all adventures.

Those, therefore, who are a little more considerate, take a different course: yet often scarce a better, and

sometimes a worse. They despise the weakness of being caught with every bait of present pleasure, or abandoning their lives to the direction of mere chance; and follow, with great attention, art and industry, what the world calls their interest. But this being their only view, the disappointed are totally miserable: and, more or less, all are disappointed; the far greatest part, very grievously. And the small remainder, who seem to attain their wishes, betray, under the fairest show of outward prosperity, evident tokens, that they have very little inward enjoyment to compensate for the many and long anxieties that usually precede. Few things come up, even at first, to what they promised: and such as do, fall below it very soon; leaving the mind, at best, languid and unsatisfied. But if such persons have taken, as they commonly do take, forbidden ways, amongst others, to their ends; then additional uneasinesses crowd in upon them: painful reflections on their past behaviour: solicitous apprehensions of what may follow, both here and hereafter. For there is deeply rooted in the heart of man an inbred sense of right and wrong; which, however heedlessly overlooked, or studiously suppressed by the gay or the busy part of the world, will, from time to time, make them both feel, that it hath the justest authority to govern all that we do, as well as power to reward with the truest consolation, and punish with the acutest remorse.

Others, therefore, see the absolute necessity of bringing virtue and duty into the account, when they deliberate concerning the behaviour that leads to happiness. And were the regard, which they pay to these, universal and uniform, their happiness would be as complete as human nature and circumstances permit. But too often they, who practise conscientiously some

duties, with strange inconsistency utterly despise others. And, which is stranger yet, many, who profess the most general concern for moral obligations, quite forget the first and strongest of them all, the reverence due to Him, who made us. The ties which unite them to their fellow-creatures, they readily acknowledge: but unaccountably slight their absolute dependence on their Creator, and the consequent veneration, which they owe to that Being, *of whom, and for whom, and to whom are all things.** Now if any dispositions are good, religious ones are such. They proceed from the same principle, with the very best of others: the exercise of them is the noblest exertion of that principle; and yet some affect to set up virtue in opposition to piety; and would be thought desirous to serve the former, by depreciating the latter. Some again, who are more upon their guard, yet explain themselves freely, on occasion, to allow nothing further than this; that religion may be of use to keep the bulk of mankind in order: not reflecting, that the upper part have still greater need of its restraints, than the lower; and that whenever it comes to be spoken of, as only an instrument of policy, it will be no longer so much as that. But lighter minds run wilder lengths by far: and absolutely indifferent what harm may come of it, perpetually treat all sacred subjects, as if freedom of thought about them consisted in pouring the utmost contempt upon them that was possible.

Yet perhaps very few, if any, of these, would they consult their hearts honestly, do so much as imagine they have any reason to doubt, but a world, so visibly full of beautiful order and gracious design, must have been first formed, and be still governed by a most powerful,

* 1 Cor. viii. 6. Heb. ii. 10. Rom. xi. 36.

intelligent, and beneficent cause. This, the least degree of consideration, how else the frame of things could be what it is, will sufficiently shew: and every advance in the knowledge of nature, makes the proof, in proportion, fuller and more obvious. If then there exists a Sovereign of the universe, almighty and all-wise, it cannot be a matter that we are unconcerned in. He, by whose pleasure we are, and according to whose determinations about us we shall be happy or miserable, is not a being unrelated to us: nor, while he continually superintends every thing else on this earth with the exactest care, will he ever neglect the worthiest object, which it presents to his view, the affections and behaviour of his rational creature, man. He must expect every thing to act, as its nature requires. And having distinguished ours with the knowledge of himself; he cannot have left it in our choice, to lay him aside out of our thoughts, as if we knew him not: but must have intended, that we should pay him those regards, which are his due.

Now the first of these, and the foundation of all the rest, is a proper temperature of fear and love: two affections, which ought never to be separated in thinking of God: and, therefore, whichsoever is expressed implies the other. The text hath mentioned only *fear:* but evidently means that kind, which children feel towards a wise and good parent; which the Psalmist had in his thoughts, when he said, *There is mercy with thee: therefore shalt thou be feared.** As God is infinitely good; and hath not only bestowed on us all the temporal blessings that we enjoy; but offered us, on the most equitable terms, through the mediation of his blessed Son, and the grace of his holy Spirit, pardon of our sins, assistance of our weakness, and everlast-

* Psalm cxxx. 4.

ing life; surely he is amiable in the highest degree: and insensibility to his goodness, whilst we are moved with the faint shadows of it in his creatures, would be shocking depravity. But then he is almost inconceivably awful; absolute in authority, resistless in power: we and all nature are entirely in his hands, and depend on the breath of his mouth. Such a being, we must own, *is greatly to be feared, and had in reverence of* the highest of *them that are round about him:** Much more then ought the sons of men to contemplate him with abasement, and even *rejoice in him with trembling.*† Far is this from being below the firmest and the bravest soul. Not to feel a dread of God, must be the grossest stupidity: and not to own it, the most impotent affectation. A worthy heart will think pride against its Maker the extremity of wickedness: and value itself on expressing zealously that loyal and thankful submission, which is due so justly to the King of all; that faithful and affectionate obedience, which his precepts claim, who hath bought us to himself, with his blood; that respectful and ready compliance to which his holy motions are entitled, who graciously *worketh in us both to will and to do.*‡ In these things consists the true *fear of the Lord!* For as the text, though conceived in the most general terms, undoubtedly comprehended at first the whole of Jewish piety, we ought to understand it now, as comprehending the whole of Christian. And that practising this, is the true wisdom of man, I shall proceed to shew you distinctly, by considering its influence

I. On our conduct,

II. On the enjoyment, of our lives.

I. On our conduct.

Some indeed, mistaking the dictates of sensuality and

* Ps. lxxxix. 7. † Ps. ii. 11. ‡ Phil. ii. 13.

vanity for those of reason, presume to speak of the Author of our nature, as if, by giving us the several inclinations belonging to it, he had warranted the unrestrained indulgence of them all: and so would make his being of no consequence to our actions. But a little reflection will easily confute so wild an imagination; and shew us, with how great propriety the wise king hath said, that *the knowledge of the holy is understanding*. He, who is perfectly holy and righteous himself, must have regard to what is right and fit in others. He, who hath provided with such fatherly care for the common good of us all, can never have left us at liberty to defeat his purpose, by injuring and corrupting one another, and filling his world with confusion and misery at our pleasure. He hath not planted in us passions, affections, and appetites, to grow up wild as accident directs; but to be diligently superintended, weeded and pruned, and each confined to its proper bounds. He hath not endued us with a principle of conscience, to be overborn by resentments and interests, drowned in sensual gratifications, led captive by fashions and fancies: but to be cultivated and improved; and then obeyed, as the guide of life. Its authority is derived from himself: and its judgment upon us will be finally affirmed by his own. For it cannot be, that the Sovereign of all the earth should either fail to reward such as dutifully promote his gracious designs, or let any one be a gainer by acting in contradiction to them. These things every person's own heart, if permitted, will tell him very plainly. But our understandings are unhappily prejudiced in favour of our bad inclinations: and were they less so, the unassisted reason of fallen man is able to trace out but a very imperfect system of religion. And therefore to complete the assurance of its great truths, express re-

velation from above hath given us undeniable evidence, that universal virtue is God's law, and eternal happiness or misery its sanctions: adding at the same time whatever more particular notices, directions, and encouragements our condition wanted. Now what can possibly influence men, like such a motive so enforced? And how weakly must they judge, or how ill must they mean, who would abandon so solid a foundation of right behaviour, to lay the stress of so important a building on any other!

It would both be unjust and unwise to reject the smallest inducement to any part of goodness: for we greatly need every one that we can have. But it is extremely requisite to observe, where our chief security lies, and place our chief trust there. The reasonableness, the dignity, the beauty of virtue, are doubtless natural, and ought to be strong recommendations of it. But how faint impressions do they make on the ignorant and slow of apprehension, on minds agitated with passions, or hardened in sins! And indeed how soon do such impressions, if single and unsupported, fade away out of all minds, or dwindle into mere speculation, amidst the temptations of a bad world, the allurements of sense, and the treacheries of *a deceitful heart!** Again: the temporal advantages of virtue and bad effects of wickedness, ordinarily speaking, are weighty arguments. But still, how often doth that weight fall on the wrong side; or give little help, if any, to the right! In short, many incitements to think and act as we ought, are in general useful: but none is at all times sufficient, excepting only the fear of God *taught as the truth is in Jesus.*†

This is one unchangeable motive, level to the ap-

* Jer. xvii. 9. † Eph. iv. 21.

prehension of every person, extending to the practice of every duty, including at once every moral disposition of heart, and every prudent regard to our own good. There needs but a thought to bring it with such force to our minds, as will check the strongest passions, curb the most extravagant levity of spirit, overbalance the greatest temporal advantages; and make whatever is our duty appear, in the strongest light, to be our interest. The fear of God can pierce the inmost recesses of our minds, and search the rightness of our most secret desires. Reflecting well what his eye sees there, will make us see it in a point of view, that we never should else; and put us on approving our souls to him by simplicity and truth: no longer attempting, as unhappily we are too prone, to cheat others and ourselves with false appearances; but faithfully bewailing all our past faults, and watchfully guarding against all future ones. Particularly, the consciousness of having such a witness to each action and purpose, must powerfully incline us to be very composed and moderate in every proceeding, very mild and reasonable towards every person. Reverence of God's authority will make us fear to injure the meanest of our fellow-creatures; since even he is under the protection of the Almighty. And hope of sharing in his bounty, will teach us to imitate it by the tenderest exercise of humanity and compassion. Thus influenced, those of higher rank would be public blessings and examples: their inferiors would love and honour his image impressed upon them: and all would endeavour to fill worthily whatever station the wisdom of Providence allotted them: discharging conscientiously the duties of the most laborious, and counting it an honour to serve God in the least considerable.

But let us now inquire,

II. What effect the fear of God must have on the enjoyment of our lives.

Unquestionably it will make bad people uneasy. But then it is both for the world's good, and their own, that they should be so. It is not their thinking of their condition, that renders it a dreadful one. The less they feel it, the worse it is: and feeling it to purpose will be the happiest thing possible for them. Farther: this fear doubtless restrains persons from dissolute pleasures, and dishonourable means of obtaining profit, power, advancement. But so doth virtue: so for the most part doth common prudence. And religion never forbids us even a hurtful gratification, but it offers us happiness hereafter in return for our present self-denial. Farther still: we must own, it gives a peculiar seriousness and awe to the mind of man. But we have need to be kept in order by a sense of God's parental authority: and without it should quickly become ungovernable, mischievous, and wretched. He requires us not in the least to be gloomy and comfortless; or full of terrors, while we mean to do well: but freely permits us the cheerfullest use of all our faculties, that is consistent with innocence, and with making improvement in goodness our chief care, as it will be our chief felicity.

And if the thought of him doth moderate the liveliness of over-gay dispositions; it prevents, by so doing, many great evils, into which they would otherwise hurry us; and fills us with much more inward and deeply-felt satisfactions, than those light and trifling ones, that only play upon the surface of an inconsiderate mind. Or did that composure, which piety introduces, lessen our enjoyments for a time; yet, being what our state on earth, which is in many respects a serious one, demands; if we are wise, we shall gladly

conform ourselves to the condition which God hath placed us in; and trust him, that the consequences will be happy.

Such indeed will every one, who makes the trial, soon find them. What pleasure can be greater, than a full persuasion, that our behaviour is approved by Him, who knows our hearts, and will reward with his friendship whatever we do aright? The world is generally a negligent spectator, and too often an unfair interpreter, of the best actions. This cannot but give uneasiness and discouragement to virtue, unless it be animated by nobler views. But the recollection, that God looks on with esteem, sets us above the censures of men, and even above their applauses. For were all mankind to join in doing justice to exalted merit: how poor would the recompence be, and how low the delight, compared with his, who can lay open his principles and his behaviour, with humble confidence, before the Judge of all!

Then as to the sufferings of this life; which, very frequently make up a great share of it; religion entirely prevents many of them, by withholding us from the sins and the follies that commonly bring them upon us. And it wonderfully diminishes the rest, by loosening our attachments to what we must expect to be disappointed in, or separated from; and leading us, from the *broken cisterns* of worldly comfort, to God *the fountain of living waters;** in the assurance of whose grace, our great interest is safe, under every change; and by the superintendency of whose providence *all things work together for our good.*† What are the poor consolations of philosophy, or the amusements, which thoughtless minds take refuge in, to

* Jer, ii. 13. † Rom. viii. 28.

deceive their sorrows, compared with such cheering reflections as these! Still, what is naturally painful, must be felt so: but the insupportable part of every affliction is taken away, when we consider it, as ordered by Him, whose right to dispose of us we must acknowledge, and of whose kind intention to us we may always be sure.

A heart, habitually formed to such meditations as these, with what serenity must it pass through its allotted pilgrimage here below! It hath nothing to fear: it hath nothing to hide, from others or itself. It can bear solitude, and its own inspection. It can even rejoice in the sense of his presence, who is to others inexpressibly terrible; but to the pious soul an immoveable ground of security, an inexhaustible source of happiness. For, indeed, what greater happiness can we wish to ourselves, than to be placed under the fatherly guidance of infinite foresight and power; borne up under all the calamities of life; and, which is the great point, exalted with the noblest hopes of what shall follow after death!

Our time on earth is so short; and our pleasures at best so languid and rare, and mixed with so many anxieties, pains and sorrows; that surely it is a melancholy view, to think of ending here; and after a very few days are gone over our heads, becoming for ever, as if we had never been. Yet this is much more than irreligious persons can possibly promise themselves. Could there be no God, they would have no certainty, but that their beings might continue, and might be miserable. For what is there that may not be, on the supposition of an ungoverned world? But since there is a God; slighting and disobeying him must be crimes, and must be punished. We may have little

attention to this perhaps, in the tumult of youthful fancies and worldly pursuits. But when the close of the scene approaches, and age or sickness rouses up reflection from its sleep, then will the sinner, in all likelihood, see, with terror unspeakable, those awful realities, of which, if he is never convinced in this world, he will only be the more wretched in the next. But the darkest hour to such, may, with reason, be the joyfullest to him, who having faithfully acknowledged God in all his ways, perceives that now his work is over, and his reward at hand. Undoubtedly it is best to use no stronger expressions on this subject, than the less experienced may feel to be just: else, words want force to describe the difference between these two conditions. It is true, not all pious souls are conscious of it, just at the time of their departure. Frequently their setting sun is obscured by insensibility: sometimes overcast by doubts and fears. But they shall instantly behold it rising again, to shine with unclouded and increasing lustre to all eternity. For *light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart. Rejoice in the Lord, ye righteous, and give thanks at the remembrance of his holiness.**

Such then is the good influence of the fear of God: and his genuine fear can have no bad one. Reverence of a wise and holy being will never mislead men into any thing wicked or weak. False religion, indeed, may do both: and so may false notions of virtue or friendship, or any other valuable quality. But this was never thought an argument in any case besides, against being governed by the true; and yet less ought it in the present. God *must be worshipped* by us *in*

* Ps. xcvii. 11, 12.

*spirit and in truth,** let others worship him as wrongly as they will: and his laws must be obeyed, let ever so many mistake errors of their own for such. The danger of superstition is a very powerful reason, why religious belief and practice should be watched over, and directed right: but cannot possibly be a reason, why dissolute profaneness should be encouraged or suffered. Let rational piety be thoroughly established, and superstition falls of course. But if the former be rooted out, the latter will certainly grow up in its place. There is a natural bent in human minds to believe and respect an invisible power: and if it be turned aside from pointing, in a proper manner, towards its proper object, it will soon acquire some other form; probably an absurd and pernicious one. Infidelity promises great freedom and enjoyment of life: but in fact it proves, in proportion as it prevails, a state of madness and confusion, of perpetual danger from others, of discomfort and desperate resolutions within mens own breasts: and therefore, after some trial of it, they will eagerly run away from it into the opposite extreme.

True religion then being of such importance, there are some things which may justly be expected of mankind in its favour.

1. That they, who have not yet carefully searched into the grounds of it, should not take upon them to treat it with scorn, or even disregard. What so deeply concerns all men, and what the wisest and most considerate of men have lived and died in the firm belief of, ought not surely to be thrown aside, on hearing only a few superficial objections, and ludicrous turns of words to its disadvantage. There must need more than this to confute it; and therefore whoever, with

* John iv. 24.

little reading and little thought, finds much inclination to disbelieve, should learn to suspect himself, instead of his creed, and be modest in proportion to his unacquaintedness with the subject.

2. It may be expected also, that they, who profess to examine, should do it fairly. Most men will be backward to confess, that they wish against religion; because it is confessing, that they have reason to fear, if the universe be well governed. But each ought to think well, whether this be not secretly his case, and remove the prepossession of his bad life, before he pretends to be an upright judge. After that, if he finds difficulties, let him remember, that they are to be found in every thing, and yet something must be true. If he meets not with the sort, or the degree of evidence, which he looked for; let him recollect, that, a fair mind will be satisfied with any that turns the scale. If he doubts of some points; let him still hold fast those which remain undoubted; and preserve that respect to religion in general, which will prove his best guide in every particular. Nay, were it possible for him to doubt of the whole; yet, since doubt is not certainty, his practice however should be on the safer side. And if he sees, as one should think he must, that scepticism and infidelity will destroy the chief comfort of the good, endanger the virtue of all, and weaken the bonds of civil society; never let the poor vanity of propagating his notions tempt him to be the author, or promoter, of so dreadful a mischief to human kind. But

3. The last and most important thing of all to be expected is, that they who are so happy as to believe, should secure and complete their happiness by what alone can do it, a suitable behaviour. Too often the contrary course is taken: and many who had once

some regard for religion, but unhappily accompanied with vicious indulgences, force themselves to throw it off, that they may sin undisturbed. But let no one imagine, that denying God will make the least amends for disobeying him; or that stifling our convictions can ever give any true peace; which is only to be had by enforcing them home on our hearts, and conforming our lives to them. This we have all need to do with the utmost care, amidst so many, so powerful, so sudden temptations to the contrary, as the world and the devil, and our own corrupt nature, throw in our way. And as the reverence of our heavenly Father is the most effectual preservative, we ought to keep up that in its full strength, by frequently repeating fervent prayer to him, and affecting meditations upon him. How intirely the exercises of devotion are laid aside by some; and with what indifference, and even contempt, a mere outward shew of them, now and then, is just retained by others, who yet call themselves Christians; too many of you, I fear, know too well: and it furnishes matter of melancholy reflection, not only to every pious, but every prudent mind. For good men must feel, that the regard, due to God, is a most inward, constant and awful one: and wise men must surely perceive, that neither can the common welfare be preserved without morals; nor morals, without religion; nor religion, without worship; private worship, to strengthen our own sense of duty; and public worship, to spread it amongst others.

On all accounts, therefore, it is our most important concern to cultivate and express the affections of piety; which are indeed the noblest movements of our souls towards the worthiest object, towards the attainment

of the most blessed end: and to awaken ourselves from the remissness, into which we are apt to fall, on this head beyond others, by reminding our hearts often, that God is present, and a future state soon will be so; and how soon to any of us, none can tell. May we all resolve, from this moment, to strive earnestly for a happy share in it, through faith in the merits of our dear Redeemer, and a right use of the suggestions of the divine Spirit: to both whom, with the Father Almighty, be honour and praise, now and for ever! Amen.

SERMON II.

MARK viii. 34.

AND WHEN HE HAD CALLED THE PEOPLE UNTO HIM, WITH HIS DISCIPLES ALSO: HE SAID UNTO THEM, WHOSOEVER WILL COME AFTER ME, LET HIM DENY HIMSELF, AND TAKE UP HIS CROSS, AND FOLLOW ME.

EVERY word, which proceeded out of the mouth of our blessed Lord, must unquestionably deserve a very serious attention. But some things being peculiarly needful to be known, or liable to be forgotten; to these, on proper occasions, he demanded the especial regard of his hearers: and as they were bound to pay it, so are we. Thus in the foregoing chapter, finding it requisite to confute the Jewish traditions in favour of that ceremonial purity in their persons and food, which led them to overlook the moral purity of the heart, we are told, that *when he had called all the people unto him, he said, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand. There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him,* wicked thoughts and their consequences, *those are they that defile the man: if any man hath ears to hear, let him hear.** With the same kind of solemnity he delivered the words of the text: which indeed had still greater need of it, as the former contradicted only received opinions and customs; but these, the strongest

* Mark vii. 14, 15, 16.

of our natural passions and appetites. *When he had called,* &c.

Taking up the cross relates, in the primary and strict sense, only to suffering patiently for the truth :* a duty, God be thanked, less common amongst us at present, and which therefore I shall pass over. In its larger acceptation it will be found to coincide with *self-denial :* a word of great importance to be rightly apprehended, because it expresses here the condition, on which alone we shall be acknowledged the true followers of Christ. The terms of salvation are indeed elsewhere laid before us in phrases more intelligible at first sight: but illustrating this darker one will not only contribute to prove that the different views of the Christian doctrine are all consistent with each other, but discover to us the principal cause of our acting wrong, with the most effectual method of amendment, perhaps more fully, than any thing else can. I shall therefore endeavour,

I. To explain the literal meaning of the expression :

II. To shew with what limitations it must be understood:

III. To set before you the obligation of the duty, comprehended under it; and its importance to our virtue and our happiness.

I. To explain the literal meaning of the expression.

We speak every day of denying ourselves such or such a pleasure, that is refusing to ourselves the enjoyment of it. But the Scripture sense goes much beyond this, and extends to renouncing and disowning ourselves; throwing out of our thoughts the relation that we bear to our own persons; and behaving with as little indulgence, as if a mere stranger to us, were in question. Of course we have in general the most concern for those of whom we have the most

* Vid. Suicer in Σταυρος, p. 1005.

knowledge. And hence, in the sacred books, knowing or owning any one signifies having a regard for him: and denying any one, the contrary. Thus wicked persons are said to *deny God, while they profess to know him,** and our Saviour in return will deny them at the great day, saying, *Depart from me, I know you not.*† Thus also, in the Old Testament, when the children of Levi had suppressed a rebellion of the people against God and their lawful governors, by falling without distinction upon all whom they found engaged in it, Moses describes the heroic behaviour of that tribe in these terms: *who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him, neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children; for he observed thy word and kept thy covenant:*‡ That is, they preferred their duty to Heaven and the public, before the tenderest private regards. Job comes yet nearer to the phrase before us: *Though I were perfect,* which he had just been disclaiming, *yet would I not know my soul;*§ were I freer from faults than I am, it should not tempt me to self-partiality.

But indeed the context may suffice to shew the meaning of the text. Our Saviour had been foretelling his future sufferings. Peter's warm zeal for his Master overpowered his respect, and he *began to rebuke him, saying, Be it far from thee, Lord, this shall not be unto thee.*‖ But the holy Jesus immediately rebukes him in return before the disciples; tells him he was, in the tendency, though not the design of his words, a tempter, an adversary to him; and influenced by human weakness, instead of religious fortitude. *Get thee behind me Satan: for thou savourest*

* Tit. i. 16. † Matth. vii. 23. xxv. 12. Luke xiii 25, 27
‡ Deut. xxxiii. 9. § Job ix. 21. ‖ Matth. xvi. 21, 22.

*not the things that be of God, but those that be of men.** Then calling *the people to him* also, but in kindness to the well-meaning Apostle concealing from them the particular occasion, he assures them, with that noble disinterestedness, which he shewed perpetually, that if they would become his disciples indeed, they must *deny themselves* and follow him: disregard as he did and should do, every instinct and aversion, every passion and affection that belong to the human frame.† And harsh as this declaration may seem, he hath used a harsher yet. *If any man come to me, and hate not his father and mother, and wife and children, and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.*‡ Agreeably to which, St. Paul sets it down at the head of a long catalogue of most dreadful sins, that *men shall be lovers of their own selves.*§ But now it will be thought full time, that a doctrine so alarming should

II. Be put under due limitations.

For, after all, self-love being a part of that nature, which God hath given us, can we, or ought we to divest ourselves of it? Is there any possibility of happiness without it? Doth not religion apply to it as our main principle of action, recommend its precepts chiefly from their tendency to our good; and even make our own *love to ourselves* the measure and rule of that, which we ought to have for *our neighbour?*‖ Why, doubtless these things are true: and so evidently true, that we may be sure our blessed Saviour, whose life was in no respect unnecessarily austere, and whose doctrine is every where else so rational and mild, could never intend to require in the text, and the few

* Matth. xvi. 23.

† See Authorities of the Fathers for this interpretation in Suicer. voc. Απαρνεομαι & Αρνησις.

‡ Luke xiv. 26. § 2 Tim. iii. 2. ‖ Matth. xxii. 39.

others that resemble it, either that we should deny and disregard ourselves intirely, which is impracticable; or uselessly, which would be unfit. And therefore, as he could not, without the utmost unreasonableness, be suspected of forbidding a prudent and virtuous self-love, he might safely and advantageously employ the strongest terms in prohibiting a weak and vicious one: for in such cases abatements at least sufficient hardly ever fail of being made. However, to prevent mistakes and misrepresentations, he hath taught us more particularly, how to interpret all his injunctions of this kind, by interpreting himself the hardest of them, (that of *hating* every thing which we naturally hold dear) to bear only the comparative sense of *loving* nothing *more than him,** but preferring obedience to the laws of God before any other consideration. For in the strict and literal meaning, his Apostle hath told us, *no man ever yet hated his own flesh.*†

Had he enjoined us a number of difficult observances, of which we saw not the use, we ought certainly to have believed they had one, and obeyed him implicitly. But since, on the contrary, he hath established a spiritual religion, neither imposing unaccountable restraints, nor encumbered with many or troublesome ceremonies; we ought both to receive it with most joyful reverence, and to preserve it in that amiable simplicity, in which he delivered it: not laying on ourselves any burthen, but such as may enable us to bear the better what he hath laid on us; and much less usurping dominion over the practice of others.

Extremely ill therefore hath the Church of Rome understood the nature of Christianity, in appointing as proper instances of self-denial, so many frivolous and

* Matth. x. 37. † Eph. v. 29.

vexatious austerities of abstinences and penances, that serve to no good purpose; and encouraging multitudes to make vows of living separate from the world in poverty and celibacy, only to spend a tedious life in the meritorious employments of wearing different habits, eating different food, keeping different hours, and observing different rules in common things from the rest of their fellow-creatures and from one another: as if it could be the intention of infinite wisdom and goodness to set men on finding out new ways of being uneasy and absurd. They plead indeed, that such methods habituate them to a spirit of obedience, and a readiness of parting with their own inclinations. But obedience to God cannot be shewn by doing what he never commanded: and blind obedience to mere men he hath cautioned us against, instead of requiring it. We are to *deny ourselves and follow Christ:* not to *deny ourselves and follow* guides, equally fallible with ourselves, into whatever extravagancies they direct, that will only produce ignorance and bigotry in one part of the world, and contempt and abhorrence of religion in the other. But these additional duties, which the Church enjoins, they say, conduce to the more easy practice of those which God hath enjoined. Why, some of them, in some cases may: and then they should, with prudence and moderation, be used and recommended. But prescribing by mere human authority, a great number of such things, at all adventures, for almost all alike, or for any during their whole lives, is an evident mark, either of wrong judgment, or bad design. To the inconsiderate indeed they make a specious appearance. But if we reflect, how exorbitant a degree of ill-used power and wealth hath been artfully obtained by requiring them first, and occasionally dispensing with them afterwards; how little good is done

by them, that might not as well have been done without them: and how very much evil naturally must, and in fact doth, arise from them; needless difficulties and disquiet to the good, false hopes to sinners of compensating for the wickedness which they continue to indulge, spiritual pride in those who observe them rigidly, and uncharitable censures, nay often persecutions also, of such as do not; we shall be fully convinced, that superadding thus imaginary duties to real ones is far from promoting the true interests of Christian piety. And indeed all hardships under which men put themselves of their own accord, not being enjoined in Scripture, nor evidently needful to preserve them from sin, and to raise their thoughts to a better world, (especially if they tend to promote rigour and sourness rather than mildness and humility) hurt instead of benefiting them, and discredit religion with others: which in itself is a *reasonable service*,* and directs us *not to refuse the good creatures of God*, but to *receive them with thanksgiving*.†

But some will ask, is not this explaining away to nothing what Christ hath most solemnly commanded as a very important duty? How doth such doctrine leave any room for self-denial? And wherein after all will it consist? I answer, in what human nature usually finds much more reluctance to practise, than any of the severities mentioned yet. For there are none, that wicked men will not gladly undergo, rather than quit their favourite faults. Besides, the strict imposers of unnecessary restraints on their fellow-christians or themselves in some points, generally make amends in others by proportionable indulgences

* Rom. xii. 1. † 1 Tim. iv. 4.

of unlawful gratifications. And so, between both, it seldom fails, but sin and superstition make a shift to go on, hand in hand, very comfortably. But the true self-denial allows of no such compromises. It is an absolute and universal surrender of every part of us to the disposal of our Maker: not only of the cravings of flesh and sense, but of self-opinion, self-will, self-interest: of love and hatred, hope and fear: nay, not of our appetites and affections only, but of *every imagination** of our understandings also, short of that full conviction of truth, which the God of truth himself hath appointed for our guide. In a word, it is giving our whole selves away from ourselves, as it were into his hands; and determining, once for all, that not our own thoughts, inclinations, and desires, shall govern us, but the laws of God: not *our will, but his,* however contrary to it, shall *be done.*† These inward principles are, in a moral sense, the man: and it is, in full propriety of speech, denying and renouncing ourselves, when what we should conceive or wish or chuse is laid entirely out of the question, and the only thing regarded is, what Heaven points out to us, to believe and do, whether by reason or by revelation. Mortification and self-denial have both of them been often almost wholly misapprehended: and even, when somewhat better understood, have been much confounded one with the other. But though nearly akin, they are very distinguishable. The former is killing, destroying sin within ourselves: the latter, disowning and casting off whatever is dearest to us, in such degree as is necessary to destroy sin. And this being the nature of the duty, we need never fear, but occasions of practising it will be frequent

* 2 Cor. x. 3. † Luke xxii. 42.

and trying enough. The much greater need will be to fill our souls with a strong conviction of what I shall now endeavour to shew.

III. The indispensable obligation of it, and its unspeakable importance to our virtue and our happiness.

That Being, *of whom and to whom are all things,** whose nature is absolutely simple and infinitely perfect, *cannot,* as the Apostle expresses it,† *deny himself.* There is nothing within him, but rectitude and holiness; nothing without him, but what wholly depends on him: and therefore his sole rule of action must be his own good pleasure. But the most exalted of creatures, being his servants and his property, are essentially so far bound to self-denial, as not to do their own will, but the will of him who sent them into life. And in proportion as the frame of any moral agent is compounded of superior and inferior principles, the more he will be obliged to disregard and deny the lower, in order to follow the dictates of the higher. But wretched man, fallen and sinful, lies under a heavier necessity of this kind; for, made up of wrong propensities, in the degree that he is, in order to *deny ungodliness and worldly lusts,*‡ he must *deny himself* continually. Christ indeed hath procured us by his blood the means of recovery from this lamentable condition: but still he only frees us from slavery, to subject us to a just and gracious government: *we are not our own, for we are bought with a price:*§ and since by Him we live, who *were dead in trespasses and sins,*‖ we are to *live henceforth, not unto ourselves, but unto Him, which died for us, and rose again.*¶ So that both as creatures, and as fallen and redeemed creatures, self-denial and self-surrender

* Rom. xi. 36. † 2 Tim. ii. 13. ‡ Tit. ii. 12.
§ 1 Cor. vi. 19, 20. ‖ Eph. ii. 1. ¶ 2 Cor. v. 15.

is our indispensable general duty. And we shall find it previously necessary to the right performance of every particular duty that lies before us.

Our appetites, passions, and fancies, are by nature many: and partly by the corruption of our nature, partly by voluntary indulgence, they are headstrong and mischievous. What must be the consequence then, if we either study to humour them still farther, or let them take their own free course? Plainly, that they will become quite ungovernable, and multiply sin and guilt upon us without end. The very thought of virtue and piety will be so excluded, as seldom to occur to us: and whenever conscience doth adventure to sound the unwelcome words in our ears, it will be silenced, overpowered, and banished from the place where it ought to dwell and preside. Sometimes it may carry a single point or two: but still, what upon the whole is uppermost in our hearts, will upon the whole govern our lives; and the occasional victories, obtained now and then, will be attended with continually greater difficulty and pain, and therefore will be attempted less and less frequently. Look around you: look within you: what is our general condition here on earth? Immoderate desire of wealth or power or fame, or pleasure, or ease, resentment, envy, vanity, some wrong inclination or other, it is well if not more than one, springs up early: an ill-judging self love cherishes it without examination: we take it hastily for granted, that here lies our happiness, and accordingly pursue it: many, without ever putting the question, whether virtue or religion forbid them or not. Others indeed do chance to reflect a little at times; some of them enough to form a sort of resolution, that they will quit such and such of their vices, perhaps all of them. But then, as they will, notwithstanding,

preserve in general the same false tenderness for themselves that they ever had, and leave to mere inclination or caprice the same dominion over them; it is easy to foresee, that these resolutions must have a very ineffectual, a very short-lived influence, and every thing quickly relapse into its former state. So long then as we suffer it to be at all a determining reason for acting thus or thus, in cases of importance, that we have a mind to act so, there cannot be any hope of our behaving right with the least uniformity or constancy: and the only way is, to strike at the root of all our faults, wrong self-indulgence. instead of cutting off little branches and twigs, that will sprout afterwards faster than before.

Nor is this of more consequence to our virtue than to what is closely connected with it here, and inseparably hereafter, our happiness. Every principle in our nature was originally placed there for our good, but, when corrupted and improperly exerted, produces harm to us. And in particular, the dear affection that we bear to ourselves, if it seeks to attain its end by mistaken means, must fail of it, and make us miserable. The tender fondness that will suffer us to miss no pleasure, and bear no hardship, will as certainly destroy all firmness and health in the soul, as it doth in the body, and unfit us in both respects equally for what we must have to go through in life. Under this unhappy management, groundless aversions and pernicious desires grow continually more vehement; wild fancies multiply; each of them claims the absolute sway, and we are torn in pieces by their contentions. Or if they rule more amicably by turns, the various pursuits to which they successively prompt us, we often see at the time, are leading us to ruin: yet we know not how to be so cruel to ourselves, as to

prefer the united interests of this world and the next to a present favourite inclination. So we grasp momentary pleasures, quickly followed by lasting uneasiness: are tormented by daily disappointments in what we obtain, as well as what we aimed at without success: and very commonly, after innumerable follies and sufferings, the whole ends in despondency and sourness, dislike of ourselves and every one around us, dissatisfaction with the universal state of things, and the very Author of it: whilst, like ungoverned children, we know not what we would have, and nothing can please us. For the same gratification of every humour, that makes children both wicked and wretched, hath just the same effect on all those, who, by treating themselves in the like manner, contrive to be no wiser throughout the course of their lives than they were at the beginning. But, whether we go on to be tossed through a restless variety of wrong pursuits, or fix on some one, that shall carry us forward more uniformly in error, it is in effect the same thing. By the one means or the other we are sure to be miserable, even in this world, and unspeakably more so in the next, if we permit our own wills and passions to be our guides.

Therefore our blessed Lord, *the way, the truth, and the life,** who perfectly knew, both what our nature and condition require of us, and what our Maker designs us for, hath pointed out the only wise method; that we *deny ourselves, and follow Him:* that, renouncing the indulgence of our own inclinations, we take his example and his laws for our only rule; and, without standing to compute what we may lose or suffer by it in this or that case, venture to give up body and soul in all cases to his government; and

* John xiv. 6.

seeking happiness by no other means than obedience, trust God for the consequences. Were we but in such a state of mind, we should have one invariable rule to act by, "This is my duty, therefore nothing shall seduce me from it: this is contrary to my duty, therefore nothing shall engage me in it." We should have one general and full answer constantly ready for all temptations, instead of the manifold disadvantages and hazards of debating particulars with each of them singly. Their force must be unspeakably lessened, would we but follow this direction in earnest; never admit an ensnaring second thought to creep in and puzzle a plain case, nor afford time to a vicious desire to argue the point with us, and paint itself out in plausible and inviting colours to deceive us; but, the moment we see it to be vicious, look on it in that sole view, reject it without delay for that sole reason, and think no more of it. Else we shall be all inconstancy and irresolution, distracted between the *services of two masters*; sometimes preferring one, sometimes the other; then contriving a thousand silly schemes to reconcile both, and entangled by every endeavour in fresh perplexities. Whereas, would we thoroughly give up our whole selves into the hands of our rightful Sovereign, and fix the regard we owe Him for the one principle of our conduct; the presence of that thought would awe into silence whatever was opposite to it; our bad inclinations would die away and be forgotten; good ones would spring up, and have nothing to oppose their growth: a better self, *a new man created after the image* of God would be formed within us, instead of that which we had put *off*;* and our advances in goodness would be astonishing: like those of the pious Corinthians, whose charitable con-

* Col. iii. 10.

tributions, the Apostle declares, were beyond his hopes: *but*, saith he, *they first gave their own selves to the Lord, and then to us by the will of God.**

This indeed is the only way to be religious: and religion is the only way to be happy. For, the true good of man, let us search for it ever so long, or fancy about it what we please, can never be found where it is not; and is only where our Maker hath placed it. All our capacities for it are of his bestowing: our whole being is at his disposal. If we withhold any thing from him, the holiness of his nature, the honour of his government, bind him to convince us of our guilt and folly. If, on the contrary, we resign all to him, he will *give us* back *richly to enjoy*, as the Scripture expresses it,† all that is innocent and safe: he will reward us eternally hereafter for abstaining from what would hurt us even here: and it is inconceivably absurd to imagine we can provide for our own interests better, than by intrusting them with him. Nor perhaps in general do men imagine they can: but they see what is right, and dare not attempt it. A cowardly apprehension of pain in the effort keeps us in the far worse pain of a divided state of mind and life. We avoid some faults, and cannot prevail on ourselves to avoid others. We resolve against all sin, it may be: but cannot resolve against the things that we know will lead us into sin: so we leave stumbling-blocks in our own way, and undo every thing as fast as we do it. Then for a while self-reflection causes bitter remorse, but immediately self-indulgence brings forth new transgressions: and, in this wretched circle, we go round and round to our destruction: whereas one thorough determination, well kept, of yielding up all without

* 2 Cor. viii. 5. † 1 Tim. vi. 17.

reserve to God, would extricate us from this labyrinth, and settle us in a firm state of inward peace: the present advantages of the change would be great beyond belief; the future, infinite: and thus the self-denial our Saviour enjoins would appear to be the only true self-love.

But then we must not think, that forming such a resolution is all that we need in order to accomplish it. A vain opinion of our own strength is one part of the self that we are to deny: else we shall never have strength to any real good purpose. Our blessed Lord assures us, that *without him we can do nothing.** St. Paul assures us, that *we are not sufficient to think any thing as of ourselves.*† And repeated experience hath given us all, I fear, too many proofs of this truth. If then we are wicked, our only way is, that, yielding to the convictions of God's word and spirit, we apply in the name of our blessed Redeemer for power to *deny ourselves and follow him:* that through him, as our high priest, we *present our* souls and *bodies a sacrifice to God,*‡ beseeching him to accept the gift, to take and keep possession of us. And though we think ourselves ever so good, yet if we imagine we are become such, or hope to continue such, by our own abilities, we deceive ourselves, and *know nothing yet, as we ought to know.*§ *By the Grace of God I am what I am,* saith the Apostle; *I laboured more abundantly than they all; yet not I, but the grace of God, which was with me.*‖ *I am crucified with Christ, nevertheless I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.*¶ Nay, lastly, if we flatter ourselves, that even by the means of help

* John xv. 5. † 2 Cor. iii. 5. ‡ Rom. xii. 1. § 1 Cor. viii. 2. ‖ 1 Cor. xv. 10. ¶ Gal. ii. 20.

from above we have attained to a perfection of self-denial, or of any other virtue, we mistake our condition, endanger our humility, and neglecting to press forward, shall be driven back. Indeed, though perfection is ascribed to men in Scripture, by way of opposition to characters wilfully and essentially defective,* and of comparison with others of inferior goodness,† and in respect of God's gracious acceptation through Christ Jesus ;‡ yet, strictly speaking, the hope of ever attaining it here is vain, notwithstanding that the struggle to advance towards it ought to be incessant: for the nearer the approach, the greater the reward. But *who can say, I have made my heart clean, I am pure from my sin?*§ *For there is not a just man upon earth, that doth good, and sinneth not.*‖ When we put off these bodies, and not before, *that which is perfect being come, that which is in part shall be done away.*¶ Our understandings shall be thoroughly enlightened, our affections completely purified, our wills intirely conformed to that of our heavenly Father; we shall love ourselves only as bearing his image, and *God shall be all in all.***

* Job viii. 20. ix. 22. † Job. i. 1. ‡ Col. i. 28. § Prov. xx. 9.
‖ Eccl. vii. 20. ¶ 1 Cor. xiii. 10. ** 1 Cor. xv. 28.

SERMON III.

TIT. ii. 6.

YOUNG MEN LIKEWISE EXHORT TO BE SOBER-MINDED.

INSTRUCTING men to *remember their Creator in the days of their youth,** is laying in their hearts the only foundation of every thing good and happy: but the work is far from being completed, when the foundation is laid. Not only the general duties of life are to be built upon it; but the particular duties of every one's condition in life: for these of all others, we are most concerned, and yet often least willing, to know and attend to. They should therefore be drawn out, and laid before us as minutely as they well can: and each be called upon to study those more especially, which he is more especially obliged to practise. Now as the several tempers, ranks, and employments of men, and the several relations they stand in to each other, so their several ages also, lay them under peculiar obligations: for which reason St. Peter and St. John in their Epistles address themselves to younger persons, and to elder separately; and St. Paul in this Epistle directs Titus to do the same thing. But though both have much need of admonition, yet the young plainly need it most; as they are just entering into the world, with little knowledge, less experience, and yet scarcely ever any distrust; with lively spirits and warm passions to mis-

* Eccl. xii. 1.

lead them, and time to go a great way wrong, if they do not go right. In the spring-season of life, especially as it advances towards summer, whatever the soil produces, (and the human heart is fruitful of evil) shoots out so fast, that a few days neglect of weeding and pruning, occasions a visible alteration for the worse. And therefore the utmost care should be taken then, to keep all in good order, by the continual exercise of that *sobriety of mind*, that considerate self-government, which the Apostle prescribes indeed to every one, but which they who principally want it, ought to understand as principally prescribed to them. It is true, in this verse he mentions only *young men*: but in the preceding he had given the same rule for young women: and accordingly I shall speak to both, without distinction, in two discourses on this subject.

I. The first and chief thing, in which young people are concerned to shew sobriety of mind, is moderating their natural fondness for pleasure; and the two sorts of pleasure, from which they are in danger, are, sensual gratifications, and gay amusements.

As to the former, St. Paul hath directed that *fornication and all uncleanness be not once named amongst Christians*.* And the less they are named, even to caution against them, the better: provided it be well understood and considered, that they not only fill the lives of those who are guilty of them, and of others, with a variety of temporal sufferings, too commonly experienced; but fatally indispose them to the love of God and virtue, and disqualify them for the spiritual happiness of the world to come. Therefore *dearly beloved, I beseech you, as strangers and pilgrims*, whose chief interest lies not here, but in another state.

* Eph. v. 3.

*abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul.** All ranks, both sexes, how strangely soever multitudes of one seem to forget it, are equally bound by this restraint: bound to avoid every thing likely to misguide their conduct, or to inflame their desires; and to employ their thoughts so constantly on what is good or lawful, as to exclude from them what is bad. For by such care, early taken, the preservation of their innocence will be easy: which, for want of it, is falsly imagined impossible. Thus then, to speak in the words of our Apostle, *Let every one know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour, not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles, which know not God.*† And to that end, Let *every one,* as Solomon advises, *keep his heart with all diligence: for out of it are the issues of life.*‡

Together with the sins of this kind, those of intemperance in drinking, or even eating, which are closely connected with them, ought to be carefully shunned, as peculiarly opposite to the character of *sober-minded,* by young people; who of all others have the least need of such indulgences, and are the most hurt by them; subjected to painful and dangerous diseases; exposed to early distress in their circumstances; and besides, for the most part, either sunk into stupidity and insignificance, or raised into wildness and madness, frequently followed by proportionable dejection and melancholy. Therefore, instead of such excess, they must, as St. Paul farther directs, *keep under the body and bring it into subjection;*§ not by hurtful or fanciful austerities, but by rational self-denial: remembering, that even in common exercises and contests of strength and activity, *every man, that striveth*

* 1 Pet. ii. 11.
† 1 Thess. iv. 4, 5.
‡ Prov. iv. 23.
§ 1 Cor. ix. 27.

*for the mastery, is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we an incorruptible.** This and every passage of Scripture, which admonishes to *flee youthful lusts,*† they must frequently read and recollect, and pray over, as the most powerful means to secure, and if they fall, to recover, themselves. For *wherewithal shall a young man cleanse his way? even by ruling himself after thy word.*‡

The other sort of pleasures, especially dangerous to young people, are gay amusements. Undoubtedly cheerfulness is as innocent, as it is amiable: it may and should be expressed by those that have it, and allowed and encouraged by those who have it not: for it both gives delight, and doth good. The disposition to it was unquestionably planted in us by our Maker, with intent that it should be gratified: and youth is plainly the natural season for it. But still, all this by no means exempts it from discipline and government. Suppose a constitution or a temper, by nature warm and choleric, should be industriously or negligently farther heated, instead of being watched and moderated; what would be the consequence? Suppose that gravity and wariness, which is as natural to old age as gaiety to youth, should for that reason be carried on to its utmost extent: plainly that would be wrong. Surely then the contrary extreme is equally wrong. And indeed if we consider the make and circumstances of man, we shall soon discover many motives for keeping a strict hand upon our inclinations to all the several things which I have just mentioned.

Love of pleasure is undeniably one part of our nature: but sense of duty, and concern for lasting happiness, are as evident and much more important parts: yet we must often trample upon these, if we always

* 1 Cor. v. 25. † 2 Tim. ii. 22. ‡ Ps. cxix. 9.

follow that. Immoderate desires of present gratification, if we suffer them to be constantly soliciting us, will frequently prevail when they ought not; and hurry us on suddenly, or intice us gradually, to such lengths as we never intended; possibly till our heart is totally corrupted, and the care of our conduct intirely thrown aside. Witness the many examples of dispositions, that once promised better things, betrayed by indulgences merely indiscreet at first, into gross vices, and sometimes open dissoluteness. Now what ruins or impairs our virtue, is in proportion prejudicial to our happiness; even that present happiness, which the votaries of pleasure are pursuing. Not only reason proves this, if they would condescend to be reasoned with, but daily experience. How many have we all of us seen or heard of, who setting out with nothing worse than a thoughtless passion for diversion and entertainment, have grievously, nay perhaps irrecoverably, injured, in a few years, some their healths or fortunes, others their characters and peace of mind; and treasured up for the remainder of their days, pain and want, remorse and shame, it may be artfully palliated, but severely felt! Think then awhile, you that are young, and have pity on yourselves. Shall all this firm and vigorous strength, this affluence of circumstances, this ease of heart and openness of face, this delightful prospect of being esteemed and happy through the whole of life; shall it, merely for want of a little self-restraint, be cast away in the very entrance upon life, and exchanged for guilt and misery, to abide with you during the rest of it? For these are the natural fruits of such neglect: and it is the weakest vanity, to hope that you shall escape better than others, unless you keep safe upon firm ground.

Or suppose you come off ever so much better than

you had cause to expect: still making pleasure your main business must hinder you, first from preparing for, then from attending to, the proper employments of your station: by which alone you must be great sufferers, and probably others besides you. But farther; indulging, and, by indulgence, adding force to desires of this kind, spoils and vitiates the inward frame, just as feeding too freely on meats of high relish doth the bodily appetite. Common food quickly becomes insipid: and in a little time we are surfeited of what pleased us most. Then follow sickly longings for we scarce know what: and the conclusion is abhorring and nauseating every thing. So it is with the mind. They who must always have somewhat extremely delicious to fill up their hours, reject as flat and tasteless a number of things, with which others are very well entertained. What they themselves were entertained with once, after a while grows cloying: and as the world is not formed to afford exquisite novelties frequently, they have miserable intervals of eager wishing for delight, which if they seem now and then to obtain, their satisfaction in them very soon deadens away to nothing. And thus they waste their days in the affectation of wonderful felicity, but in the real suffering of most wearisome satiety and listlessness. Human nature is not fitted to support a perpetual flutter of jollity and mirth: which, like spirituous liquors, may appear at the instant to raise and enliven those who use them; but, generally speaking, will soon wear them out, and sink them down into a deplorable state of languor and lowness; from which at length the most pernicious augmentation of the dose will scarce afford them a moment's relief.

Therefore be persuaded to look forward a little, and attend to consequences. Let the love of pleasure im-

portune you ever so strongly; still, how delightful soever the draught is, to swallow it can never be all, that a thirsty person hath to consider. It must be a much more material question, whether no mischief will ensue. Mistake not the beginning of life for the whole. Providence in great wisdom hath furnished every period of it with proper satisfactions of its own, and proper employments for the service of the next. Youth is to prepare us for the comfortable enjoyment of manhood: manhood for that of old age: each part of our existence on earth for the blessedness of Heaven. Second the intention, pursue the direction of your gracious Maker; and be assured you will never find your account in contradicting it. You relish only such and such things at present; but provide for the feelings you will have hereafter; and, like those who are to travel through different climates, lay in for them all, what the knowing and prudent advise. Suppose in your childhood you had done whatever was then agreeable to you, and nothing else: how sad a figure must your youth have made! Why, just as contemptible and wretched will your riper age be, if you follow that rule now.

Or could you escape all inconveniencies here from such behaviour; yet, as you cannot think this even a moral, much less a religious manner of life, you may be sure it must end ill hereafter. You were created, not merely to please yourselves, but to serve your fellow creatures, and honour your Maker. You have faculties given you for those purposes: you are to account for the use of them. They are become by the fall of our first parents weak and insufficient: you have used them ill; and made your condition yet worse. A method of pardon and recovery is offered to you; but offered on terms of deep repentance, hum-

ble faith in a Redeemer, diligent care to preserve yourselves from sin, to improve yourselves in goodness: eternal rewards are promised to such as thus become qualified for them; eternal punishments are threatened to those, who are *lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God.** Think well of this: and run mad after them if you can. *Rejoice, O young man in thy youth, and walk in the ways of thy heart, and in the sight of thine eyes: but know thou, that for all these things God will bring thee into judgment.*† Solomon doth not forbid here all use of worldly gratifications, but all such use as we cannot answer for.

Therefore allow yourselves in fit instances of pleasure, at fit seasons, to a fit degree; and enjoy them with a merry heart: but never let the thought of living to pleasure get the least possession of you. Be industrious to check so absurd and destructive an imagination, by diligent application to some proper business, and fixing a frequent return of hours devoted to retired and serious recollection. The mere composure and quiet of them will be no small advantage to you: but you will find it a much greater, to stop from time to time, and see whereabouts you are; to consider whether you are fallen into no wrong course; whether you make any progress in the right; whether any danger be near, whether you are taking the best method to avoid it. No joy on earth can exceed that of answering these questions well. And if any thing be otherwise than well, knowing it, is the only way to mend it, and that, the only way to inward peace: of which our gracious God and Father is willing that they, who have most offended him, should on their sincere repentance and reformation immediately partake. Therefore often examine your own condi-

* 2 Tim. iii. 4. † Eccl. xi. 9.

tion: and at such times also, turn off your eyes a little from the gay scenes of life; take the other parts of it into view, and consider on the whole, what this world is. A very different place, from what those who are intoxicated with youthful warmth and sanguine expectations, for a while imagine it to be. Set therefore in your view the disappointments and perplexities, the cares and fatigues, the pains and sorrows, of which you amongst the rest of mankind must undergo your share: and while the appearance of things is brightest, as the wise king directs, *remember the days of darkness, for they shall be many.** Not that you are to break your spirits or damp your activity, by melancholy prospects and apprehensions; but only to compose your hearts into a state suitable to that which you live in, and form your minds to be content with few and low enjoyments from the things around you: for in such a world as this, it is certain misery to aim at high happiness.

Still prudence may secure you a good degree of comfort here: and religion will exalt it into joy. For to the pious soul light will arise out of darkness; and all the vanity and vexation of the present life give assurance to those, who go through it as they ought, that God will make them ample amends in a better. Therefore in your hours of private meditation, fail not to renew the remembrance of your Creator; think of all you enjoy as his gift; think of all his laws as kind and necessary provisions for your temporal or eternal welfare; think of every transgression as the grossest folly, mixed with the basest ingratitude; and have Joseph's reply in readiness for every temptation, *How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?*† Fervent devotion from a pure heart is undoubtedly the

* Eccl. xi. 8. † Gen. xxxix. 9.

most pleasing of all employments: for it is the exercise of the sweetest affections, hope and love on the worthiest of objects; a Being infinitely able, and equally attentive, to reward our attachments to him, to defend us from every real evil, to bestow on us every real good, and in due time the full enjoyment of the supreme good, himself. Therefore warm but your hearts with these delightful sentiments; and you will never repine at any needful restraints from earthly gratifications. Only preserve in your piety itself that soberness of mind, which is requisite in every thing: that it may not fly out into raptures of enthusiasm, or zeal without charity; but may be uniformly rational, mild and beneficent.

This article of moderating their love of pleasure, is of such singular importance to the young, that I could not avoid enlarging upon it much more, than I shall on any of the rest.

II. A second instance, in which they have great need to be *sober-minded,* is their desire of imitating others; and doing many things in compliance with fashion, to which they would otherwise have no inclination. Now conforming to those around us in points of indifference, is one commendable part of social behaviour. And moderately absurd customs, if they be harmless, it is very allowable, when once they become general, to follow and despise at the same time. But if you catch yourselves growing really fond of such things, running to the utmost lengths of them, and building to yourselves a kind of reputation upon them; then it is high time to stop, indeed to retreat. For attending to trifles will take off, in proportion, your attention to matters of moment: and if your esteem be misplaced, your lives will be misled. But, above all, beware of yielding, where it may more immediately

endanger your innocence: beware of that indifference to religion and religious duties, which of late hath appeared so peculiarly infectious; beware of being led insensibly into such a turn of talk and behaviour, such methods of employing your thoughts and your time, however polite they are accounted, as may weaken your regard to the principles of virtue. Always examine the rules of custom by those of God's word, of reason and experience; and where you have cause to distrust your own judgment, adhere to that of prudent friends, if need were, against the world. But indeed it is generally a small part of the world, a few forward empty people, that make the high vogue in every thing, and are followed thoughtlessly by others. Be not deceived therefore by the self-sufficiency, noise and vain shew, of wretches like these; nor ever mistake their opinion for the sense of mankind: but be assured, many more will esteem you for right conduct, than wrong; and even the silent approbation of the wise and good will do you much more service, than the loudest applauses of the inconsiderate and the libertine. You may be afraid perhaps of the censure or ridicule of the latter: but only take care to be pious and regular without ostentation or sourness, and by acquiring as far as you can, every laudable accomplishment, to make amends for wanting that of being wicked; and there will be small doubt of your receiving much better quarter from such, than they commonly give one another. At least, if you cannot *prevent* their scorn, surely you may stand against it, and despise it: or, if your mind be too tender for that, as in some young people it is, you have another remedy, as obvious and easy as it is necessary; keep out of the way of hearing it. Allow the most agreeable persons, that would weaken your sense of duty, as

little familiarity with you as ever you can: and strengthen yourselves in goodness continually, by the example, the countenance, the encouragement, the advice, of serious and discreet and amiable companions.

3. A third thing which due sobriety of mind requires, especially of the young, is to avoid affectation: pretending, and endeavouring without cause to be what they are not, and to like or dislike what they naturally do not. While any thing continues in fashion, they, beyond others, are hurried away by a strange desire of appearing much fonder of it, not only than there is ground to be, (which belongs to the last head) but than they really are: and often behave sillily, and sometimes wickedly, to express their passions for things, which at the bottom they have none for; at least, hardly any other, than what they took up, merely because they thought it looked well; and can easily lay down again at the shortest warning, as experience shews, and be just as highly delighted with any thing else. Now plainly such as these prostitute their share of good sense to whatever happens to be the reigning folly. And there are too many others, who though perhaps very zealous against these public affectations, have their private ones, to which they allow full scope. I am sensible, that matters of this nature may seem beneath the notice of this place: but nothing is so, which produces real evils in life. It is very true, in young minds, as in warm and light soils, numbers of weeds will spring up. But if they are nursed and cherished, instead of being rooted out, they will exhaust the ground, and choak the good seed. Therefore examine whatever you perceive within you, rather with the greater care for its being of your own growth; and never tolerate strong fancies

with weak reasons for them. Do not imagine things graceful, or important, or proper without knowing why: or that you can ever make them so, if they are not so: or that any way whatever, of thinking, behaving, or appearing, is in the least the better for your adopting it. Some perhaps may for a while, injudiciously or artfully, applaud your peculiarities: they may procure you much notice, and seemingly of a favourable kind; but this will never end well. You will get a wrong bias, and lose the true notion of the value of things; will lay yourselves open to the designs of the crafty, fall into contempt with the discerning, and by degrees with every one. Youth indeed hath advantages, which may partly conceal, partly excuse, these absurdities: but then they will fix upon you, and remain with you, after every thing that can palliate them is gone. You will have put on a character under a false notion of its becoming you, and not know how to lay it aside, even when it misbecomes you most notoriously. And if all affectation be thus bad, how dreadful is that monstrous affectation of profaneness and vice, not uncommonly seen in persons who perhaps would like full as well to be pious and virtuous, if they could but believe it would make near so genteel a figure! But venture to believe, that a blameless conduct, though it will not raise so early or so great a talk about you, will, sooner or later, distinguish you to your advantage, which nothing else can: or, however the world may overlook you at present, God will do you abundant honour hereafter. *Whatsoever thou takest in hand, remember the end, and thou shalt never do amiss.**

4. The fourth particular comprehended under St. Paul's general direction for young people in the text,

* Ecclus. vii. 39.

and the last that can be mentioned now, I shall express in his own words: *Not to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think, but to think soberly.** Liveliness and want of experience peculiarly dispose them to err in this point: and the superficial education, the disregard to all authority, human or divine, and the liberty and the practice of saying and doing what every one pleases, that prevail in the present age, have heightened and spread the error to degrees never known before. Hence they perpetually despise the most useful qualifications, and the worthiest behaviour; admire trifles, follies, and sins, as distinctions and excellencies; claim a high merit for accomplishments of which they have little or no share; imagine themselves totally free from defects that are most glaringly visible in them; pity and scorn those whom they have more cause to envy: and thus, judging falsly, in the most dangerous manner, of things and persons, others and themselves, are utterly misled in the main concerns of life. Yet they fail not to see, but take a pride in observing, from time to time, that this is the case of such and such of their acquaintance: now, would they but reflect, that it *may* be their own too, it would be no inconsiderable step towards a cure. It must put them on examining what advantages and good qualities they are really possessed of, what the real value of them is, what deductions are to be made from them on account of imperfections and failings, and what ground they have, on the whole, to hope for the esteem of wise men, and the acceptance of an all-wise God. It must remind them to consider over again the hasty judgments of their early days, and review with a suspicious eye, perhaps many notions which they are very well satisfied in, without

* Rom. xii. 3.

knowing why, and are proceeding to act upon at all adventures. Most people indeed should have more diffidence than they have, but the young much more than others. It is not natural, it is not possible, that, in the very entrance of life, one who hath taken no pains to know any thing should know every thing. And therefore when such are found, as they are every day, perfectly contented with themselves; absolutely clear, that their own way of thinking and acting, whatever it chances to be, is right; when they will venture, in questions of the greatest moment, to decide, without the least hesitation beforehand, for the least doubt afterwards, perhaps directly contrary to what the ablest persons in all ages have done; and hold every one in utter contempt, that can possibly be of another opinion; this is surely an astonishing want of sobriety of mind. At least be a little modest, till you can truly say, that you have considered and inquired with some care: for afterwards, in all likelihood, you will be so of course. Especially be modest, in proportion as any point is of consequence, and out of your reach. For instance, in religion. The duties of it are plain, and plainly reasonable. So are the doctrines too, as far as we can understand them, and judge of them: but we can understand and judge of some of them but very imperfectly. They relate to the infinite nature of God, to the boundless views of his providence, to future times, it may be a future world. No wonder, that of such things we do not comprehend the whole: though he may have good reasons whether we perceive them or not, for telling us part: and yet, without comprehending the whole, some parts must seem unaccountable. Now such difficulties as these, or possibly less, a raw self-sufficient youth chances to think or be told of, runs away with

them, and derides the weakness of those who believe what they are taught. But can it possibly make any doctrine of religion doubtful, that persons, bred up in the manner that, God knows, too many are, and living afterwards as may be expected, do not understand it, or do not like it, or have heard more of the objections against it than the arguments for it? Or should they not rather learn to suspect, that they have not a sufficient acquaintance with the subject? For what will become of good sense and right behaviour in the world, if people are to think themselves masters of every thing which they know but any thing of, and to despise every thing they know nothing of? This is both a very unreasonable and very immoral, turn of mind: it destroys all reverence for truth, all attention to the virtuous conduct of their faculties and their lives: it leads them, for the most part, to early misery here, and hardens them beyond all things against that penitent conviction, which alone can prevent their misery hereafter. Justly therefore doth the Prophet denounce: *Wo unto them that call evil good, and good evil: that put darkness for light, and light for darkness. Wo unto them that are wise in their own eyes, and prudent in their own sight. Therefore, as the fire devoureth the stubble, and the flame consumeth the chaff: so their root shall be as rottenness, and their blossom go up as the dust; because they have cast away the law of the Lord of Hosts, and despised the word of the Holy One of Israel.**

* Isa. v. 20, 21, 24.

SERMON IV.

TIT. ii. 6.

YOUNG MEN LIKEWISE EXHORT TO BE SOBER-MINDED.

IN discoursing on these words, I have already mentioned four particulars, in respect of which it is peculiarly necessary for young persons to preserve sobriety of mind, and exercise a watchful government over themselves: their natural gaiety and love of pleasure, their fondness for imitating the customs and fashions of the world at some times, their proneness to affectation and wrong singularities at others, and their almost universal inclination to entertain too high an opinion of their own advantages, accomplishments, and abilities. Were this opinion to go no farther than their own breasts, it would be a great fault, and have very bad effects: but when it is shewn to others, and even demands their notice, the case becomes much worse. And therefore an additional indispensable duty, comprehended under the character of *sober-minded,* is,

5. That how well soever they may apprehend they see cause to think of themselves, they should behave with humility towards those with whom they have any intercourse: and remember that, in young people above all, modesty is exceedingly graceful, and a remarkable want of it shocking. It is not meant that they should be frighted, confused, and disconcerted in what they say or do before strangers and superiors:

this would be a weakness; though, when it doth not go very far, an amiable one. Much less is it meant to enjoin so strict a silence or reserve, as may bring the goodness of their understandings or tempers in question: but only, that their words, looks, and actions, should express a consciousness of what is very true, that they have reason, from their youth and inexperience, to be in some degree suspicious of themselves, even where they seem to be most plainly in the right. Still, what they are fully convinced, on deliberate consideration, is their duty, they must adhere to, so long as the persuasion continues, though persons, ever so much farther advanced in age or knowledge, dissuade them from it. But even in this case, and certainly then in others, they ought to shew every mark of due regard to those from whom they differ. And the most obliging submission is very consistent with liveliness and spirit: it may give strong proofs of dignity, at the same time with respect; and by throwing the most advantageous light on every accomplishment, it will please every one worth pleasing beyond all things.

It is very true, that quite different methods, a confident behaviour, and a manner, in conversation, bold even to great lengths of indecency, seem to take with too many: even with some who cover their ignorance or neglect of true good breeding and politeness, with high pretences to both. But then, as the liking which they have, or pretend to have, for these undaunted spirits, can be accompanied with no real esteem, so it seldom holds long; and yet seldomer either produces or intends any good to those who are distinguished by it. For persons of judgment will by no means pitch on those for any purpose of importance, with whose empty forwardness they are most diverted for an idle

hour. The very quality, that recommends them in this latter respect, is an insuperable objection against them in the former.

Another thing ought to be observed, which in our youth, at least, we commonly overlook; that they, who love to be often placing themselves in full view, whatever care they take about their appearance, are apt to have more seen of them, than is to their advantage. And this danger is the greater, as whoever desires too earnestly to make the best figure he can, will almost certainly be carried on to aim at making a better than he can, and of consequence will make a much worse than he needs. Great numbers, who might have passed through life with abundantly sufficient approbation and regard, by the mere help of plain good sense and good temper, have, by affecting more agreeableness or sprightliness, more judgment or knowledge, perhaps than they had, or however than they had occasion to shew, become ridiculous to those whom they wanted to think highly of them. But a farther, and more serious evil, is, that where the passion for being remarkable is permitted to grow very strong, if laudable methods will not bring it about, people are sorely tempted to use others: to procure admiration of their persons by improper arts and freedoms, of their learning by assertions of groundless novelties, of their wit by ill-nature or profaneness. And yet after all, generally speaking, these contrivances prove insufficient. Traps, laid for applause, are almost always seen; and so disgust those who see them, that they often refuse even real merit its due acknowledgments, when they are too openly claimed. Now and then indeed these vain characters do push themselves into early reputation, without any title to it. But, as their hasty growth is unaccompanied with

inward strength, after being a short time gazed at and envied, they are crushed under the weight of their own fame, and sink back into nothing; while every one rejoices at their fall, and wonders how they came ever to rise so high in the esteem of the world.

On all accounts therefore young men ought ever to express, in their whole conversation and demeanor, a moderate opinion and distrust of themselves; with no small esteem and deference for others, how far soever they may be from making a showy appearance. For still, such persons may have a great deal more even of ornamental accomplishments, to produce on fit occasions, than you are aware of. Or supposing them not at all comparable to you in these respects, they may excel you in much more important things; in good conduct, virtue, and piety. Whatever advantages you have over any one besides these, remember it depends entirely on your use of them, whether you shall be the better or the worse for them: and be assured, they will never be truly beneficial to you, without humility of heart and behaviour. Instead therefore of the unprofitable and unsafe employment of admiring yourselves, and endeavouring to make others admire you, for qualities of small and doubtful value, indulge but a moderate complacence in the very best that you conceive you are possessed of; think how imperfect you are in them, how many others you want, how many bad ones you have; and far from cherishing the poor vanity of vying with those around you, prostrate yourselves before God, and earnestly beseech him to turn his face *from your sins, and put out all your misdeeds; to make you a clean heart, and renew a right spirit within you.**

* Ps. ii. 9, 10.

6. Another duty, comprehended under sobriety of mind, and closely connected with the former, consists in avoiding inconsiderate and vehement positiveness in discourse; to which the young, who think well of their own judgments, and know little of what others have judged, or on what grounds, are much addicted. Now affirming any thing, as more certain than you have good cause to believe it, is really an offence against truth, though you should happen to be in the right; and peculiarly unbecoming in those, who are most likely to be often in the wrong. Insisting on a point too earnestly sometimes provokes very dangerous resentments, especially when two of the same warm temper are of different persuasions. And cooler and wiser men will seldom care to venture upon giving you information, when they see you so little disposed to receive it. For want of such monitors, you will often go on, for a long time, asserting as unquestionable, what is false or doubtful. Others will perceive it soon: you will be forced to see it yourselves at last: and then what shame and vexation will you have brought upon your own heads! Whereas proposing your notions with an ingenuous diffidence will secure an easy retreat, if they chance to be confuted; and urging your reasons, when they are strongest, with modesty of speech, will make you beloved, as well as admired. You should therefore constantly bear in your thoughts, and imitate, the engaging behaviour of Elihu in Job: who, having first waited till his elders had spoken, *answered and said: I am young, and ye are old: wherefore I was afraid, and durst not shew you my opinion. I said, days should speak, and multitude of years should teach wisdom. But there is a spirit in man: and the inspiration of the Al-*

*mighty giveth them understanding: therefore hearken to me: I also will shew you my opinion.**

7. A seventh instance of sobriety of mind, yet more important than the former, indeed so visibly important, that a few words will suffice about it, is guarding carefully against rashness in conduct. Words may pass over, and prove of small importance; but actions are always of moment: and yet the young too commonly act without scruple or distrust. Sometimes this arises from the pride of thinking, that they cannot act amiss: but sometimes also from mere thoughtlessness, or a lively impatience of deliberation, joined with that peculiar enterprising disposition, and unwillingness to believe any harm will follow, which youth inspires, and riper years find bitter reason to lament. For indeed, what one thing is there dreadful in life, which this adventurous giddiness doth not frequently bring on men, in the very beginning of their days, and it may be fix down upon them to the end? You, of all others, ought to be cautious: for you have much to lose, even in this world; and to plunge at the first step into misery is a deplorable thing. You must be sensible, that multitudes have done so, and multitudes are doing so every day, through mere negligence, perhaps but a little negligence: and if you are guilty of as much or more, how can you hope to escape better? It will cost you far less time and trouble to avoid errors, than to retrieve them. Some cannot be retrieved at all: others, but imperfectly. With your best care you will find it hard enough to keep intirely clear of them: and what then must become of those, who professedly take no care at all, but give up their lives to fancy and chance?

* Job xxxii. 6, 7, 8, 10.

S. Another point, in which it is very uncommon, and yet very needful for young people to be sober-minded, is, in moderating their natural hastiness of temper, and readiness to take offence. It is in vain to think of reckoning up all the occasions, on which this fault appears in them: but some ought to be mentioned particularly.

One is, that they are too commonly provoked at receiving advice, and resent it as an affront. Now if it be given, as it certainly is for the most part, solely or chiefly from good will to you: what a monstrous, what a barbarous thing it is, to wound the hearts of your best friends doubly: first by your indiscretions, then by your ingratitude: to tell them, that is no concern of theirs, which they cannot help being most tenderly concerned about; and insist on the right you have, to ruin yourselves, if you please! But perhaps they take upon them, not only to advise you, but be angry with you: and that you cannot bear. Now it is very possible, their anger, or however the degree, or time, or manner of expressing it, may be improper: or, on the other hand, it may be more necessary, than you imagine, or care to own. But at least, it is a proof that they mean you well: else, why should they give themselves any disquiet about you? And even if they do mistake in some things, or go too far in their fears for you, still the reason of their solicitude is so kind, that the excess of it may well be excused. Or suppose it not to proceed from affection, but from what you will, conceit, censoriousness, hatred, if you please; it will be well worth your while, to attend to it so far however, as to make your advantage of it, by amending or vindicating or guarding yourself. And if they, who give you good advice, be your enemies, it will be

much better to grieve them by taking it, than to please them by persisting in sins or follies.

There is a farther instance of warmth of temper in young people, which frequently hath very bad consequences, though it proceeds from an excellent principle. They set out with the liveliest sense of right and wrong in many cases: would God it were the same in all! They have usually a strong abhorrence of doing unworthy things for the sake of interest: and it is great pity, they have not an equal abhorrence of doing as unworthy things for the sake of pleasure and applause. But this aversion to baseness and unfairness, (though it can never be too deeply rooted, and to begin the world with indifference in these respects is a very bad sign, yet,) if they are naturally of eager spirits, hurries them on into most grievous errors. In public affairs they grow hot-headed and outrageous; inattentive to the weight of those reasons, and the merit of those persons that are against them; impatient to take the worst of methods, that promise but the attainment of their imagined good ends; in short, excessively unreasonable and injurious; and all with an intention of acting the honestest and noblest part that can be. In private life the same immoderate warmth prompts them to conceive sudden and furious antipathies on the slightest foundations: to magnify small faults or none into unpardonable crimes; and pursue the supposed offender with most unrighteous resentment, mistaking it all the while for just indignation. Now men of such vehement dispositions, which exert their vehemence chiefly in the season of youth, if they have any reflection, cannot help knowing their danger: and therefore should conscientiously and perpetually be on their watch against it: should

think seriously in their cooler hours, how much the misrepresentations of others, how much more the violence of their own natures, may disguise things to them; and, it may be, have actually done it many times already: think what imperfections there are, in the minds and behaviour even of those who are well-disposed, in their own amongst the rest; think, even supposing the things, or the persons, they are angry with, very bad, whether the bitterness of their anger may not be as bad: think how much better and safer it is, to lean towards the milder side; and how exceedingly blameable they will have been, should all this heat, or a considerable part of it, prove at last to be groundless and unjust. But, next to the danger of unreasonable aversions, ought to be mentioned,

9. That of unreasonable fondnesses: against which the young, if they will preserve a due sobriety of mind, must always be strictly on their guard. They have had little opportunity for, and therefore can have little skill in, a part of knowledge, that requires a great deal, judging of characters. And yet they will enter all at once into such bosom friendships with almost mere strangers, as a prudent person would scarce contract with those, whom he had known longest. Sometimes these sudden intimacies end in as sudden quarrels. And when they last longer, the case is often yet worse. The favourites, chosen so hastily, are for the most part ill chosen; and when a confidence without reserve (for youth hath very little reserve) is placed in those, who either design, or only judge amiss; in how many respects may they misguide, to what contempt may they expose, to what fatal errors may they lead, their inconsiderate admirers! Therefore beware of plausible insinuations and agreeable appearances: allow none to put themselves upon you for what they

please; but examine them well, and always consult your old and sure friends in the choice of new ones. Indeed if you never chuse any, perhaps it may be no harm. Familiar acquaintance you may have with many. A proper degree of trust you may repose in some. But your life may pass, without meeting with one, to whom you can with safety open your heart intirely. And most of the pretended strict friendships are mere interested combinations in the elder, and a mixture of fond fancy and affectation in the younger. Therefore keep on the watch; and particularly against those, whom perhaps you are least apt to suspect, who express the most complaisance to you, and are the fullest of your praises, especially to your face. If this behaviour be owing to weakness, they are unworthy of your esteem: if to design, they are dangerous. For the Scripture hath said, *a man that flattereth his neighbour, spreadeth a net for his feet.** Instead therefore of running into the arms of such, keep them at a distance. And with whomsoever you enter into a closer connection, continue still to observe, with candor indeed, but with vigilance too, how they conduct themselves, what impressions they are making upon you: nor think it any breach either of fidelity or good-nature, to part with the dearest friend upon earth, rather than endanger your piety, your virtue, your happiness, or even your character. Farther yet; carefully avoid the weakness and injustice of extolling your intimates too highly, either in your discourse or even your imagination, and disparaging others in comparison; but still more carefully avoid promoting their interests in opposition to reason and equity, to private right or public good.

10. Another part of sobriety of mind, highly and

* Prov. xxix. 5.

peculiarly requisite for the young, is a discreet management of their expences. Covetousness indeed, hateful and despicable as it is in the elder, would be somewhat worse in them: but all is not covetousness, that they are apt to call so: and extravagance is a mark only of folly, not of generosity, or good-nature. They, who squander needlessly at some times, will be driven to spare improperly at others, when they should have been bountiful: and so will make a truly mean figure, because they would needs make a falsly great one. Then if their profuseness rise to any height, it creates them great uneasiness with their parents and friends: whom it always fills with fears about them, and frequently straitens and distresses: it occasions (as they must run in debt) difficulties and losses, oftentimes ruin, to those with whom they have dealings; and usually to such of them as deserve it least: they must bring themselves into continual perplexities: they will of course be tempted, either to drown the sense of them by intemperance, or to aim at getting out of them by dishonest arts and methods, of one kind or another; yet probably in vain. And if they come to have families, they will in all likelihood utterly undo those, who ought to have been the object of their tenderest love and care. Remember therefore to set out cautiously: consider well, that to rise in your way of living is very easy; but to lower it, one of the hardest things in the world: and lay it down for a rule, that no income whatever can support negligence and expensiveness.

11. The eleventh proof which young persons should give of a sober and reasonable mind is to fix upon, and keep closely to, some fit manner of spending their time. For none of it is given us to be thrown away: and unless they apply early to what they ought, a

habit of idleness will soon take firm possession of them. To those of lower rank, necessity reads the daily lesson of industry: it will make their condition comfortable and reputable: and if they think of being maintained at their ease, they are infallibly ruined, body and soul. But whatever rank we are of; without some employment, life must be tedious: and unless proper employment be chosen to fill up the empty spaces of it, gross imprudences and sins will be crowding into them. Or if the idle could avoid these, yet surely it is bad enough, that they cannot avoid making a despicable figure in the world; that their inattention, which will gradually produce an incapacity of conducting their own affairs, must subject them to an absolute dependance upon others, who may impose upon them without fear, to their great prejudice, in more ways than one. And besides, how painful will the reflection be to you, (if ever you have any reflection) what happy circumstances you might have been in, what an honourable appearance you might have made, had it not been for this contemptible quality! But a still more alarming thought is, that those abilities and opportunities of improving yourselves, and being useful to your fellow-creatures, which God hath bestowed on you, he will hereafter call you to answer for: and he hath warned you before-hand, that *the unprofitable and slothful servant, who hath hid his talent in the earth, shall be cast into outer darkness.**

All people therefore, and the young especially, should keep themselves, not only employed, but employed to good purpose. Both their friends and they should be very careful, not to direct their aim to a wrong point: for there are unhappy mistakes of this

* Matth. xxv. 25, 26, 30.

kind. Such things are frequently made the study and business of life, as those who employ themselves in them had much better know nothing of; at least can be little the better for knowing ever so well. But they take up a groundless fancy of their own, or follow a weak judgment or silly example of another; set their whole hearts on gaining a reputation in some errant trifle; and so, with great pains, become very accomplished, and good for nothing. Not that slighter accomplishments, if they be real and suitable to our station, are to be overlooked: or beginners in life to be severely blamed, if they do place a little higher value on such matters than they deserve. But much care should be taken by those about them, and still more by themselves, (for who is so nearly interested?) that occupations of mere amusements do not fill up too much of their thoughts or time. Perhaps they are very innocent, perhaps they are very elegant: and therefore even the well-disposed, amongst others, indulge their inclinations for them without scruple. But still there is an essential difference between things of entertainment only and things of use: and young people should be formed, as soon as possible, to attend to this difference; and should always remember, that the subjects for their minds to dwell upon, the employments for their days to be spent in, are partly the particular ones, that belong to the several situations, in which they are now, or probably will be placed; partly the general ones, of improving their understandings in proper knowledge, but above all, their hearts in the love of God and their duty: and to throw away life upon other pursuits to the prejudice of these, is not only an imprudence, productive of great inconveniences in this world; but a sin, justly liable to punishment in another.

12. And lastly, one instance more of sobriety of mind, which ought to be sacredly regarded by the young, is preserving and expressing a due esteem and reverence of such as are farther advanced in years. It is true, the natural temper of the two extremes of life is very different: but Providence hath kindly mixed them together in society, for mutual benefit. Undoubtedly the aged are subject to imperfections and faults: yet probably you often accuse them unjustly: or if not, have not you imperfections and faults too, upon the whole more justly disagreeable to them, than theirs are to you? Still these ought not to hinder you from being loved: nor should those hinder them from being respected. They should interpret candidly the sallies of your inconsiderateness: and you in return, should pass over the little failures in point of temper, which infirmities may render very excusable in them; and bear with the restraints of possibly too great caution, parsimony and regularity: though in general their long experience must have made them better judges of these points, than you are as yet. But indeed it will for the most part be in your own power, to take off these restraints from yourselves in a great measure, if not entirely. Check but that levity, which raises in them suspicions of you; behave so, that you may safely be trusted; and endeavour to be agreeable to them, as they do continually to be useful to you: and all will be well. Your sprightliness and gay humour was unquestionably designed in some degree to comfort and enliven their declining age. Be not unwilling therefore to spend some share of it that way: but bestow a little of your cheerfulness upon them, in the season when you have plenty of it, and you will give them a great deal of pleasure, when they want it very much. It is a truly good-natured part to

do so. It is a proper gratitude for the many kindnesses and advantages, which all young people have received from their friends of riper years. And they may make you large amends for it, often in your worldly interests, but almost constantly in such information and direction, as will do you more service, than all your agreeableness can afford them delight. Probably it is not long, that they may continue with you. Study to profit as much as you can by them, before you are left to yourselves: and give them such a prospect of your doing well, that they may quit the world with comfort. In every common art and business, you shew great regard to experienced instructors: and can they fail to be of proportionable use in the science of conducting life, the most important and most difficult of all others? Besides, the respect, which you are now perhaps unwilling to pay, you will in time be very uneasy, if you do not receive. Therefore preserve a rule of behaviour, that you will one day find your own account in; and suffer it not, by your fault, to be lost out of the world in the mean while.

I have now gone through my design. If in the prosecution of it, I have urged motives of a temporal, as well as a spiritual nature, so hath the Scripture in a multitude of places. And if, together with greater duties, I have recommended some of lesser moment; and, amongst other faults, cautioned against several, which may commonly be thought not to amount to sins: yet whoever hath a just concern for those, who are setting out upon the journey of life, will think they need every useful admonition for the way. And it is highly requisite, that all persons, especially all young persons, should cherish, even in smaller instances, that soberness and rightness of mind, which else will soon

be neglected in more important matters: following conscientiously that injunction of the Apostle, with which I conclude. *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honourable, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report:—These things do: and the God of peace shall be with you.*

* Phil. iv. 8, 9.

SERMON V.

PROV. xvi. 31.

THE HOARY HEAD IS A CROWN OF GLORY, IF IT BE FOUND IN THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

LONG life is what all men naturally desire: and yet to most no part of life seems to have much happiness in it; and that part least of all, to which living long brings them. In their younger and middle years, between business and pleasure, they amuse themselves with tolerable success. But old age disqualifies them by degrees from relishing either: and at the same time, that it takes away their supports, adds to their burthen too; by many infirmities of body and mind, which often make them disagreeable or contemptible to others, and uneasy to themselves. Besides, in the former stages of their journey, expectation of somewhat better to follow, bears men up; but in the concluding one, this world hath no new hopes to present, and many new fears arise from the approaching neighbourhood of another: both because dying gives terror, when living gives little else but pain; and because the consequences of dying must of necessity be viewed with most concern, when we have least room left to secure their being such as we could wish.

And yet, since, if God be good, life must be a blessing; long life, it is reasonable to conclude, must, in its own nature, be proportionably a greater blessing.

For we cannot think he would plant in us the desire of what could only make us miserable: or when he hath ordered every thing else with such gracious foresight, would leave any portion of man's being, especially that which is the maturity of it here, destitute of proper enjoyments. Old age then, how much soever men complain of it, surely may be both honourable and happy: nay indeed we have plain proofs, that in fact it sometimes is so, as well as too often otherwise.

It is therefore a very useful inquiry, since the thing is possible, how we shall set about it; what way we shall take to render that part of our lives reputable and comfortable, which we are some of us in, most of us hoping for, and all of us travelling towards. Now to this question the text gives a full answer, *The hoary head is a crown of glory, if it be found in the way of righteousness.* Where undoubtedly such glory is meant as comes attended with satisfaction and delight. It is very true, much of our happiness here arises from things not in our power; a good constitution of body, a composed and chearful turn of mind, an advantageous situation in the world at first, and favourable occurrences afterwards. But still the far greatest part depends on our own prudence. And since virtue and piety comprehend the chief parts of prudence, and without them there can be no prudence to any purpose; the wise man hath named the principal thing, *righteousness*, as if it were the only one, that *crowns the hoary head with glory.* To illustrate and confirm his judgment in this point, I shall endeavour to shew,

I. What assistances virtue and piety contribute towards making old age honourable and happy.

II. That they must be effectual.

I. Now they contribute to this end by two means: laying the proper foundations for it in the former part of life, and leading to the proper behaviour for it in the latter.

1. Laying proper foundations in the former part.

Neglect of right conduct in our early years is the main reason, that our advanced ones are despicable and miserable. The irregularities of youth make old age infirm and painful, when otherwise we might have been vigorous and gay, and enjoyed an autumn, not at all upon the whole inferior to the spring. The idle expences of youth load our declining days with perplexities and distresses, when a little timely care might have secured us ever after from anxiety, and furnished us with plenty of all things against the time when we need it most. Neglect of application to proper knowledge in the beginning of our course leaves us destitute, through all the conclusion of it, both of the entertainment and the respect, which we then peculiarly want, and knowledge is peculiarly fitted to give. For as the son of Sirach observes, *If thou hast gathered nothing in thy youth, how canst thou find any thing in thy age?** Again: early indulgence of ill temper must fix a habit, that will fill our life, especially the close of it, with perpetual vexation and disquiet: default of cultivating in time valuable friendships, excludes us from the benefit of them, when they would be more valuable than ever: default of educating well those who belong to us, makes them grow up to be curses, instead of blessings, to our grey hairs. But, above all, forgetting *our Creator in the days of our youth,*† deprives us of those joyful hopes that revive and warm the decaying frame, and sinks us down under the heaviest and justest apprehensions and ter-

* Ecclus xxv. 3. † Eccles. xii. 1.

rors. All these evils virtue and religion would prevent: perhaps intirely; at least in a great measure. And it is a dreadful thing, that men will not be brought to consider this soon enough. They will not only slight the motives of another life, though it be very near us all, but will scarce look a single step before them in this. For surely did they see what they are doing, and believe in earnest, that they are employing their youth to make their riper age unhappy, they would change their conduct. But all they think of is, to crowd into a small space as much self-indulgence as they possibly can; till they almost destroy the relish of that by excess in it; and absolutely all regard to any thing better. And then, after the gay madness of a few years, what remains of life grows insipid and wearisome; and the reliefs they commonly fly to only increase their shame and wretchedness. But right behaviour will secure us that regard, even in the first part of our days, which we must not in any part expect without it. *For honourable age is not that which standeth in length of time, nor that is measured by number of years. But wisdom is the grey hair unto men, and an unspotted life is old age.**

These considerations, though much more useful, when they are thought of soon, yet are never too late to be highly beneficial. Indeed our condition can at no time be either so bad or so good, but we may still make it worse or better, as we please. They who have lived ever so ill, may by undoing, as far as they can, what they have done amiss, prevent the worst consequences of it; and obtain, in a small time, no small degree of favour from God, honour from men, and comfort in themselves: while, on the other hand, they who began ever so well, may, by deviating from

* Wis. iv. 8, 9.

their duty in the finishing period, overturn all. To prevent this, it is needful we should inquire into the

2d method, that religion and virtue take to crown old age with glory: which is, directing to proper behaviour when that age comes. And such behaviour consists again in two things: avoiding the faults, to which we are then peculiarly subject; and practising the duties, to which we are peculiarly bound.

1. Avoiding the faults, to which we are then peculiarly subject. And here,

The most common faults which persons in years are charged with, often unjustly and inconsiderately, but sometimes also with too much reason, are, artfulness and insensibility, selfishness and avarice. As they become, by length of time, more knowing and more practised in the ways of men, they contract a disinclination to frank and open dealing, and are apt to carry prudence so far, that it degenerates into craft. Their tempers also growing less tender, and gradually callous, by seeing and going through the various evils of life, they have not always a sufficient sensibility of heart remaining, to ensure to others kind and compassionate usage from them. And these are sins of great infamy and great guilt: which religion and virtue strictly prohibit; and both enjoin and encourage the most honourable fairness and friendliest humanity, as ordinarily conducive to our interest as well as credit in this world, and certainly the way to endless felicity in the next.

With the errors, just mentioned, is usually connected, one of very bad repute, yet very frequent in old age, a mean and penurious behaviour. They who are sparing in their younger days, seldom fail to be much more thrifty in their decline: and sometimes the profuse, when they leave off that folly, endeavour

to make amends for it by running into the opposite. Yet, one should think, the aged, as of all persons they are in the least danger of wanting, should be the least fond of hoarding, and the farthest from strong attachments to the world, as they are the nearest to having done with it. Perhaps indeed longer experience of the vicissitudes of things gives them livelier apprehensions of what may still happen. But as no provision can absolutely secure them, going beyond the bounds of reasonable caution is taking much pains to little purpose. Laying up for posterity is another excuse, and very often a false one. For where they have no one at all, that either nature or reason binds them to lay up for, they will be as anxiously busy and frugal, as if they had ever so many: a case which Solomon hath described admirably well. *There is one alone, and there is not a second: yea he hath neither child nor brother: yet there is no end to all his labour, neither is his eye satisfied with riches; neither saith he, For whom do I labour, and bereave my soul of good? This also is vanity; yea, it is a sore travel.** Probably indeed somewhat of the industrious and saving turn was allotted by the wisdom of Providence to old persons in general, because most of them have young ones depending on them, that need it. And if they have, to neglect them for the sake of indulging their own pleasure or indolence, is unnatural wickedness. But still, sparing and accumulating without reason or use, is both sin and folly. The chief inducements to it seem to be, that, former gratifications losing their agreeableness, men are driven to take up with this: which also they look on as the most certain means of making those about them, for their own interest, behave well to them. But surely they

* Eccl. iv. 8.

had much better, with respect to themselves, have pitched at the first on such proper things for the objects of their esteem and desire, as they could not fail of delighting in to the last; and with respect to others, it is far wiser to aim at real regard from them, by virtuous instruction given them, and prudent kindness exercised continually towards them, than to be content with this wretched method of procuring by hoards of wealth a mere pretence of regard from them. For they who on such grounds pay court to the aged outwardly, can scarce avoid despising and hating them inwardly; and sometimes long for their deaths, as nothing is to be expected from them during their lives. Instead therefore of thus tormenting themselves and those about them, old men should throw aside needless cares, and venture to partake of fitting comforts: enjoy good cheerfully themselves, and do good cheerfully to others. For why should we not chuse to be thanked and blest for those acts of beneficence now, which, if we omit till we die, it will be said we only bestowed what we could not keep: whereas if we give when we might have withheld, this is a voluntary sacrifice, and an evidence to our own hearts, as well as to the world, that we act from a right principle.

Some indeed cannot part with much before-hand: and to part with all, is seldom or never discreet. The advice of the Preacher hath in general a very just foundation: *Give not thy son, thy brother or friend power over thee while thou livest, and give not thy goods to another: lest it repent thee, and thou entreat for the same again.—For better is it, that thy children should seek to thee, than that thou shouldst stand to their courtesy. In all thy works keep to thyself the pre-eminence:—at the time when*

*thou shalt end thy days, distribute thine inheritance.** But then on the other hand, to grudge those who belong to us the expence of a proper education, or what is requisite for disposing of them decently in the world; to deny them the means of appearing suitably to their rank, and keep them in straits, while we have superfluities ourselves, is very cruel, and equally pernicious. In all likelihood, either they will grow niggardly in imitation of us, or extravagant from hatred to us; or their spirits will be broken, or their opportunities of advancing themselves lost: or if they should do well, in spite of our ill-behaviour to them, what thanks can we possibly deserve from them, though we do leave them at last, what they would have been much more obliged to us for a moderate share of, prudently bestowed some years before? And this holds, not only concerning our relations, but all our other dependants, and indeed the poor also: that when they want it, and we can afford it, the sooner we are liberal to them, the better. And therefore the same person, who was the author of the foregoing rule, delivers also the following: *Do good unto thy friend before thou die; and according to thy ability stretch out thy hand, and give to him.*†

Thus then religion and virtue direct the aged to avoid the faults of that wariness of temper, to which they are peculiarly inclined. And another fault of which they are in no little danger, but cautioned against it by the same means, is that of giving improperly and unequitably what they do give, either in their lives or at their deaths. Now and then perhaps the vanity of doing generous and charitable actions makes them too negligent of their families. But much oftener the vanity of raising a family makes

* Eccles xxxiii. 19, 23. † Eccles xiv. 13.

them negligent of the needy and the worthy, their servants, their intimates, their relations, nay, it may be, their very children, excepting one; upon whom they heap all they can, and leave every one else disappointed of what they had reason to expect, and perhaps in distress for want of it. Sometimes a different sort of evil happens: the aged are imposed on by artful people, that get about them, and ingratiate themselves by flattery and compliance and officiousness, till they obtain interest enough to carry every point they will, in their own favour, or for the advantage of those that employ them; and supplant others, that in nearness, or in true desert, either stand before them, or at least on a level with them. Nor are the aged, with all their caution, by any means so much on their guard against these wretches as they ought. At other times the fault is more intirely their own. They suffer little piques and prejudices to influence them, contrary to the justest motives, and their own former kind intentions. Now this is very hard and wrong; that a groundless dislike, or a trifling offence, or even every great offence, should change a reasonable disposition of things: above all, when perhaps expectations have been given, and the world made acquainted with them, and steps in life taken in consequence of them. Whatever right they may plead to do as they will with their own, they are not at liberty to act thus; but ought to look on the proper disposal of their fortunes as a matter of conscience; and take into serious consideration every circumstance that should naturally have weight in the case. Nearness of relation is a ground of preference, which should never be disregarded without the strongest motives to the contrary: motives which not only we ourselves think sufficient, but other good and wise persons, uninterested in the

case, allow to be such. Farther claims, never to be overlooked when we have ability for taking notice of them, are, kindnesses formerly received, promises given, length and faithfulness of service or attendance, merit, want. And all these demands the uncertainty of life admonishes every one to provide for paying as soon as he can; but the certain approach of death requires the old not to postpone it a single day. And performing this duty, as they ought, is one valuable instance of righteousness, which will give them comfort in their own breasts, procure them regard (so far as it is known) whilst they live, and do them lasting honour when they die.

Another danger to which the aged are yet more peculiarly exposed, is ill-temper. Decay of spirits, and loss of strength, joined often with beginning disorders, which they feel in themselves, before others perceive it, are very apt to make them fretful and impatient: a thing so natural, that the young and healthy should make large allowances for what they may want allowance for themselves, sooner than they imagine. But the old and infirm should consider, that the several ages of life have their several trials assigned them; and this is one of theirs: which virtue and religion as much require they should not be overcome by, as that the young should not give way to any of the temptations which beset them. Being out of humour without knowing why, is childish weakness. Being so, because we perceive ourselves declining, is quarrelling with the constitution of things, and with providence itself. And though our decline be attended with wearisomeness and even pain, yet peevishness under these will only add to them. Besides, it is very hard, that those about us must be made to suffer more than is necessary, because we are uneasy; and it

is great odds, but they will shew they think it hard by such behaviour as will augment our uneasiness: whereas bearing with mildness and patience, for the short time we have left to bear, what God pleases to lay upon us, is expressing a resignation very acceptable to him, and a sweetness of disposition very delightful to all that see it. They who act thus will seldom fail to be attended on with pleasure; to have, as they well deserve, every expression of regard and tenderness shewn them, and every method taken, which love and pity can invent to alleviate their sufferings.

It is therefore both the duty and the wisdom of the aged studiously to preserve a composed and even mind; to look upon things in the most pleasing view they can; to turn their thoughts and discourse to make others cheerful when they can; at least to appear willing and inclined to let others make them so; and when they cannot rise to any height of good humour, to keep however from falling into bad.

But instead of acting thus, too often they increase the moroseness, which their own infirmities breed in them, by a much less excusable fault, a malevolent envy at the health and strength and gaiety of others. Now this is highly blameable; instead of rising from the feast contented and thankful guests, to grudge those who come after them what they have already had their share of, and may still have a further and very entertaining one, if they please; by continuing candid spectators of those scenes, in which their time to act is past. But the pleasure, which perhaps they might otherwise take in such a view, is frequently palled by a suspicion that their company is wanted no longer; that all about them are grown weary of them, wish them dead and out of the way. Now indeed where at any time this is true,

that young persons murmur at the goodness of God in granting their parents and friends that length of days, which they will certainly in their turns, (whatever they think now) desire for themselves; it is both so wicked, and usually so ungrateful and imprudent too, that no wonder if it raises great concern in those to whom it relates: which however they will do much better to conceal and moderate, than express and indulge. But then to imagine such a thing, without evident cause, is giving ourselves as much needless uneasiness, and doing the person suspected as grievous injustice, as well can be. Human creatures are but seldom so unnatural: and excepting a few, who are very profligate, they hardly ever think the lives of others too long, unless they find their own made unhappy by them, without deserving it. Therefore let us but be sure to take care of our behaviour, and be our stay what it will, we shall seldom if ever have ground to doubt our welcome. Jealousy in all cases, but especially when attended with its most common attendant, ill-temper, is the likeliest way in the world to make that true, which it apprehends to be so. Those therefore, who would prevent their deaths being longed for, must make their lives, if possible, agreeable and useful. They must be doing things for the benefit and satisfaction of the generation that is rising under them; and give them what prospect they are able of being well paid for waiting a while. They must show themselves easy to be pleased, and receive kindly the regards paid them, and the services done them; neither resenting it nor wondering at it, if there be some failures in both; as doubtless there were formerly in their own behaviour at the same age. They must endeavour to make the time that young people spend with them not only as improving, but as easy as they

well can; and after all, not require too much of it; but both allow, and indeed contrive for them, such proper seasons of innocent relaxation and amusement elsewhere, as it must be known they cannot but desire. They who in their early days were treated with this humanity themselves, are inexcusable unless they afterwards treat others with the same: and such as were not, should remember, not only how strictly they were bred up, but how hardly they bore it, and how unreasonable they thought it.

At present indeed too great indulgence is much the commoner fault, and will certainly appear, (may I not say, hath abundantly appeared already?) to be a most fatal error; worse by far than any moderate degree of over-great rigour. But the extremity of it may be full as bad as total negligence. The one makes those that are guilty of it despised; the other makes them hated; and which bids fairest to ruin those that are educated under its influence would be hard to say. Sometimes the same persons have both these faults at once. Their favourites can do nothing wrong; those out of favour nothing right. And such partiality is the readiest way to spoil both. To the former it is a dangerous privilege: to the latter a provocation that may drive them to despair: and the importance of each error demands our utmost care to avoid it, by preserving an impartial and considerate conduct. On the one hand, young people ought absolutely to be restrained from criminal pleasures, and obliged to such application and employment of themselves, as their duty and condition require. Nay, whatever hath but a tendency to make them wicked or useless, must, in proportion to that tendency, be discouraged and prohibited. For elderly persons are far from having the sense they ought, either of their past

sins or their present obligations; if because they had formerly vices themselves they indulge those who belong to them in the same vices now. But then, on the other side, it is a grievous fault too, if the consciousness of their own youthful irregularities induce them, when they are old, to suspect and condemn others without reason. For what can be more unrighteous than to punish the innocent, or think no one is innocent, merely because we know ourselves to have been guilty? Nor is another conclusion, though frequently drawn, by any means a just one, that in our younger days, we were under such and such restraints; perhaps too, (if we have not forgot) were tolerably well contented with them; and therefore no one that belongs to us shall ever have any greater liberty. But we should remember, that different tempers require different treatment: and even the customs of different ages must have allowances made to them, and in some measure be complied with. It is very natural for the aged to think highly of the practices of their own times, and be displeased with the novelties which another generation introduces. Nor can it be denied but in several respects there is at present sufficient foundation for such dislike. But this however must not be carried too far. In matters that are indifferent it is of no importance what usages prevail: or if a less becoming, or convenient one, doth take place; provided that be all, the harm is not great. The world hath always had its follies of this sort as well as others: only, when they are out of date they are soon forgotten. And though we should carefully dispose young people, to comply with the dictates of good sense, even in the least things, because that leads them to do so in greater; yet their smaller deviations from it must be borne with: and to inveigh against these as heinous crimes, is

confounding the distinctions of things; and, by overstraining the point in trifles, we lose the regard that might else be paid us in articles of importance.

And indeed more considerable instances of misbehaviour in youth, ought to be animadverted on by the elder with due moderation. For the heart may not be near so wrong, as the outward action: and prudent gentleness will often reclaim those, whom harsh treatment will exasperate beyond recovery: especially if they can persuade themselves, as they easily do, that any part of it is unjust. Therefore it should be a constant rule, to hear them patiently in their own defence; admit their excuses, as far as they are at all well-grounded; and place their failings before them in that point of view, which is likeliest to convince their judgment, and gain their esteem: for till that is done, nothing is done effectually. To this end they should always be permitted the freedom of a decent reply: and if they should sometimes abuse that freedom a little, taking a mild notice of it will generally be the best way to shame them, or at least should be tried first.

There is likewise, in matters which are at all disputable, another motive for this conduct. Undoubtedly, in general, the aged have had by far the greatest opportunities for seeing and weighing things; and are the fittest judges of their nature and consequences. The presumption is intirely on the side of their opinion: and this ought to be considered much more than it is. But then they have not always used their opportunities to the best advantage. They may have stood still a great while without improvement; and consequently be in some respects behind those, whom in years they precede. It is not impossible, but the notions, by which they judge now, may have been

taken up altogether accidentally at first, when they were as raw and thoughtless, as those whom they direct and reprove. Or, however, though in plain matters, as known duties and sins, and allowed instances of common prudence and gross folly, we cannot be mistaken; yet in others, the wisest may sometimes judge wrong, and the most unexperienced hit upon the truth. Mildness of temper and speech therefore is very useful, on this account amongst others, that if we should happen to mistake we may confess it without reluctance or loss of credit; (for it will be in vain to think of concealing it;) and may deserve more respect, instead of less, from those whom we treat with so much fairness and condescension. When both sides are ingenuous enough to act thus; when a superior in years can frankly yield to the better argument of a younger than himself, and the younger in return behave with modesty, and a sort of decent confusion, at the advantage he hath happened to gain; it is hard to say, which character is the most amiable; and it is a great pity that both are so rare.

I must not proceed further at present: and possibly some may think, I have dwelt too much already on particulars, not important enough to be looked on as religious obligations: and that this sort of preaching is not preaching christianity. But I beg them to consider, that the design of the gospel is to make us good in small matters, as well as great; happy in our present state as well as our future; that, for want of observing such rules, as I have now given, much wickedness and much misery obtain in the world; and when they are neglected, as they are too often; by persons *professing godliness**, their profession is dishonoured,

* 1 Tim. ii. 10.

and their salvation endangered. The common duties therefore of common life, from the highest to the lowest, must be distinctly set forth, and earnestly inculcated. But then it must be constantly understood at the same time, that we have not strength to perform any duties, but through the grace of Christ: nor will our performances be accepted and rewarded, but through the merits of Christ. Always remember therefore, what surely you need not always be told, that *as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except it abide in the vine, no more can we, except we abide in him: he is the vine, we are the branches: he that abideth in Christ, and Christ in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without him we can do nothing**.

* John xv. 4, 5.

SERMON VI.

PROV. xvi. 31.

THE HOARY HEAD IS A CROWN OF GLORY, IF IT BE FOUND IN THE WAY OF RIGHTEOUSNESS.

THE uneasinesses of life in every period of it are many, and often heavy: but old age abounds with sufferings beyond the rest. Some of these proceed unavoidably from our make, and the situation in which we are placed; but so much a larger share from our own ill conduct, that the wisest of men hath not feared to pronounce in the text, that an uniform course of religion and virtue would crown even that part of our days with honour and happiness, in which we are too commonly despised by others, and wretched within ourselves.

To illustrate and confirm a truth so instructive and important, I have proposed to shew from these words,

I. What assistances religion and virtue contribute to this most desirable end.

II. That they must be effectual.

Now the first way, as you have already seen, in which religion and virtue contribute to render old age honourable and happy, is by directing us, in the former part of life, to make the necessary provisions for its being so: not to ruin our healths beforehand by irregularities, nor our fortunes by extravagance; not to make our grey hairs contemptible for want of timely application to useful knowledge and business, nor

hateful by a preceding life of injustice or ill-nature; nor fill our souls with terrors, when our latter end approaches, by forgetting *our Creator in our youth*. For these are burthens, with which we need not, unless we will, load our declining years.

I then shewed you, that after this previous care, virtue and religion direct us, how to behave aright, when the time comes; to avoid the temptations, and practise the duties, which it brings along with it.

I. To avoid the temptations.

Amongst these, one capital danger is that of a selfish disposition: which too frequently manifests its peculiar bad influence on the aged, in artifice and fraud, hard-heartedness and insensibility; unseasonable and immoderate worldly pursuits; in their denying themselves what is fit; or grudging to bestow on others, what nearness of blood, or promises made, or expectations raised, or gratitude, or friendship, or generosity, or charity, require. And besides all this, they are very liable to give improperly and unequitably what they do give. Another fault, that greatly diminishes both the honour and the comfort of the old, is ill temper: sometimes arising from their own infirmities, and envy at the health and gaiety of others; sometimes from thinking, that they are not respected and esteemed enough, and indulging suspicions that their death is wished for; sometimes again, from seeing younger people, especially those under their care, conduct themselves in a manner they disapprove.

Under each of these particulars, I laid before you the maxims and methods, which virtue and religion prescribe, for the avoiding of dishonour and unhappiness in the concluding scenes of life. I now proceed to an error of a different nature; into which they, who escape the former, frequently fall, though equally con-

trary to the rule of duty; I mean, fondness for unallowable gratifications and amusements.

Vicious pleasures in old age are doubly immoral. Offences against modesty and chastity at that time of life are unnatural, void of all excuse, and deliver over those who commit them to a most peculiar sort of contempt. Offences against sobriety and temperance, far from cheering and enlivening, in any proper manner, oppress and precipitate declining age; and turn the wisdom, which should procure reverence to the hoary head, into gross and often public childishness, if not worse. Continuing therefore to these years in follies, which we ought never to have begun, is exceeding bad: and nothing but beginning them at these years, of which there are sometimes examples, can be worse.

But suppose old persons only to dote upon innocent levities, they must expect to be ridiculed for it by the livelier part of the world, and lamented by the more serious. That no prevailing taste for any thing more valuable, should be even yet acquired, is very deplorable: and throwing away, in this idle manner, the small remainder of their days, after all the foregoing part, will render their case completely wretched. A life well spent hitherto, would have made better ways of employing their time agreeable now: and one ill spent will make them absolutely necessary. Not that the aged are to be totally debarred from fitting relaxations. Very often, by reason of infirmities of body or mind, some indulgences of that sort become highly requisite for them. And indeed, unless there be very particular occasion requiring it, old age is not the season for men to increase their application to any thing that fatigues them; but to moderate it gradually, and give themselves ease in proportion as they need it. Besides, it is a good-natured part, sometimes to join a

little in the diversions of the young; which also we may be able thus, much more effectually than by any other way, to superintend and bring under prudent regulations. But to make this, or any thing else, a pretence for gratifying inclinations, that we are ashamed of owning; to fill up as many of our hours, as we possibly can, with idle entertainments; to pursue them eagerly; be lavish of expence upon them, and make them the business of life; to be continually seeking out for still more opportunities of running away from thought, and of destroying time, instead of improving it to the noble purposes of our being; is always contrary both to religion, and to reason itself; but more especially inconsistent with that seriousness and dignity of character, which the aged beyond all others are bound to support. What may be pardonable, or even justifiable, in youth, will often sit very ill on them; and the same things, done by the one and the other, are no longer the same. Every station and every age hath its distinct propriety of behaviour. And it is a principal step, both towards gaining and deserving esteem, to understand and maintain this propriety. But the strictest attention to it will justly be expected of that age, which hath nothing to boast of, if it hath not superiority of judgment and discretion. All affectation therefore of youthfulness, when youth is over, whether in our appearance, our discourse, or occupations, will disgust those that see it: and be on good grounds thought, if not a sin, yet a very blameable weakness, and that of a wrong mind. People are never justly liable either to censure, or to ridicule, for being what they are and must be; but for labouring to seem what they are not, and perhaps cannot be. And as their acting an ungraceful part, will be observed, so they will not fail to have, either such inti-

mations from others, or such a consciousness of it within themselves, as will give them an uneasiness from time to time, to which nothing, but growing wiser, will put an end. Therefore on every account it ought to suffice them, that they have been fond of trifles and vanities, as long as ever it was tolerable to be so: and they should now put on another character once for all, that will be more easily sustained, and become them better; withdraw themselves like the venerable Barzillai, (whose resolution was doubtless recorded as a pattern*) from the delights, and the pretensions that are become unsuitable to their years; and leave them willingly to the succeeding generation.

By this time, it may be hoped, I have gone through the chief temptations, against which the aged ought peculiarly to guard themselves. The next instruction, given them by religion and virtue, is,

2. To practise the duties, to which they are peculiarly bound.

Indeed most, if not all, the duties of life belong to every part of it: but some of them are more especially the business of one part, some of another. And the first of this sort, incumbent on persons advanced in years is, serious reflection on their past conduct; accompanied with earnest endeavours to undo, as far as they can, whatever they have done amiss, and rectify the errors of their busier and warmer days. It is very true, no one of our days ought to pass over us, without carefully asking ourselves, what we are doing; and if we neglect it, till we are nigh the end of them, many important things will be forgotten, and yet so many disagreeable ones crowd into our memory, that we shall set about the inquiry into our condition with little heart; and go through it, if at all, with great

* 2 Sam. xix. 35.

pain. It is a fatal mistake, not to consider how we act, till we have almost done acting. But however, when this mistake hath been committed, it is beyond comparison, better to own it and amend, than persevere in it. And therefore such above all others, as have reason to know, that hitherto they have given themselves but small leisure for recollection, should now at least, before the time is quite past, retire a little from the world into the secret of their hearts, and coolly think over their own history: not to see, what further wrong things they can add to those, which they have done already; not to place their conduct in false lights before others, or palliate it to themselves; but to judge impartially, as in the presence of God, after weighing the various obligations they have been under, to him and their fellow-creatures, how far they have fulfilled, and how far they have transgressed, the one or the other. A review of this kind, uprightly and diligently made, may very possibly give many of our actions an exceedingly different appearance to us, from what they bore in the heat and hurry of our livelier and more thoughtless years. Still, if the new light, which we may thus receive, could be of no other use, than barely to shew us, what in reality we have been and are, some perhaps would imagine it no very desirable thing. But as it may enable us, even yet, to become what we ought to be; all must confess it to be important beyond expression. No scheme of life indeed can be more absurd, than resolving beforehand to spend it inconsistently; one part in doing ill, the other in being sorry for it. And seldom do they, who set out with this resolution, execute more than the first half. But whenever it doth happen, that any such, or any other person is convinced of his past sins; though his reformation must be uncommonly exemplary, to be

of equal value with innocence; yet, if it be at all sincere, it must be unspeakably preferable to final impenitence. For there is great virtue shewn, in breaking off the chains of inveterate habits, confessing and quitting favourite errors, and bearing patiently that variety of reflections which the vicious and thoughtless are extremely apt to throw upon all, who by ceasing to act like them, appear to condemn them. Nor will this amiable kind of goodness ever miss of its reward. God will graciously accept of such acknowledgments as we can make, though we can never make sufficient; provided we trust not haughtily in the fancied merits of our imperfect repentance, but humbly throw ourselves on his promised mercy in our blessed Redeemer. And wise and good men, far from reproaching us with the faults we have searched out and forsaken, will be industrious to give us marks of their esteem: and abundant compensation for losing the good word, perhaps not the good opinion, of our former companions in sin.

The more piously and virtuously men have lived, the less necessity they will have in their old age, for so minute a review of their ways: but then they will receive the greatest, the most seasonable comfort from it. And however good they have been; upon strict inquiry, they will be very likely to find a much larger number of blemishes and spots, than they thought of, that have stuck to them in some part or other of their journey through this dirty world; which it may afford their hearts inexpressible ease in their dying hours, to have cleared their consciences and their characters from, by judging themselves, before they go to be judged of the Lord.

A mind, thus humbled and purified, will naturally turn itself to the next duty, which peculiarly belongs

to the aged, that of religious exercises and contemplations. These things in the active part of life, are much less practised than the obligations we are under, and the direction and consolation we might receive from them, require. And false excuses of want of leisure are pleaded, whilst leisure enough can be found for trifles without number; and for too many sins, which consume no small part of the time of those, who imagine, or pretend, they have none for religion. Indeed the pretences they make for neglecting the worship of him who made them are so wretchedly poor, that in any other case, of the least seriousness, they would be quite ashamed to mention them. But this, it seems, is a subject, which they scarce conceive it worth while to talk or think seriously upon. The time will come, here or hereafter, when they will be of another opinion: and the sooner it comes, the happier for them. The cares and pleasures of life, when they are at the heighth, are far from being any reason to forget God: but the decline of life brings new reasons with it for remembering him. That calmer season at least hath many vacant hours; and what can fill them so properly and beneficially as acts of devotion and pious meditation, adapted to the state in which we then are? The aged have had longer experience of God's mercies than others, to furnish matter for thanksgivings: and it may be feared have been guilty of more transgressions or omissions, that will give them cause for confession, self-abasement, deprecation of punishment. Then besides, they must surely, by this time, have fully seen and felt the vanity of the world in every shape. Hitherto deceitful hopes have amused them on, and kept them in pursuit of one thing or another, that hath never answered their ex-

pectations; or if any did for a while, it is gone, and nothing new remains to promise themselves. Now then, at farthest, the utter delusion of aiming at happiness, otherwise than by religion and virtue, is visible to the weakest eye: and nothing appears of real value but the consciousness of acting right, and the prospect of being rewarded for it.

These then are the thoughts which alone can support and enliven old age. And how uncomfortable soever a stranger to such thoughts may imagine this condition to be: yet in truth it is a great blessing to perceive the necessity of making that our last refuge, which would have been at all times our wisest choice. Not that, in such a situation, men are to weary themselves with tedious and unprofitable tasks of piety, or sour their minds with a scrupulous attention to serious things, and no others; but only in proportion as they are able to attend conscientiously on every office of public worship, with sincere endeavours of profiting by it; to excite and nourish good dispositions, by the use of such books as are fittest for that end, especially the holy Scriptures; to lift up their souls, from time to time, to the greatest and best of Beings, place themselves before him, and exercise towards him the various affections which are his due: detaching their hearts by these means, from the world they are going to leave: and forming them more perfectly to the temper and employment of that state, of which they are now upon the borders: not disquieting themselves, if they do not succeed in this as well as they could wish, but going on to do it as well as they can.

The remaining duty of aged persons is to imprint on others, whenever they have opportunity, the same right sentiments of life and conduct which they have

acquired themselves. For it is St. Paul's express injunction, that they be *teachers of good things.** Too commonly they take just the contrary course; first live immorally; then seek for arguments to make their own minds easy in wickedness; and lastly set up the business of bringing over converts to it. And when the authority of old age is employed thus in serving vice or profaneness, especially if it be adorned with rank, or wit, or the reputation of knowledge, it is capable of doing incredible mischief. But surely it might in all reason suffice them that they have been bad themselves: and there is no manner of need that they should add to it the guilt (which one should think there were not any violent temptation to) of corrupting others to no purpose. It cannot be so evidently and so highly for the interest of mankind, to live without principle and die without hope, as to make it worth their while to become preachers and missionaries of infidelity and profligacy: a shocking employment, by which some have chosen to make their grey hairs detestable; and done many times more harm, by thus patronizing sin, than before by committing it.

But another sort, who mislead the young less visibly, but very fatally, and in much greater numbers, are they; who, having learnt, in their earlier days, neither notions of religion nor irreligion, nor of any thing in the world but profit or pleasures or honours; lead others after them in the same wrong way of thinking, and do infinite mischief, without ever considering, whether they do any.

Now the more there are amongst those to whom age gives influence, that, either designedly or inadvertently, promote wickedness, the more zealous the remainder should be in opposing it: which, if they

* Tit. ii. 3.

were, they might hope for great success. The judgment of such, as have weighed things maturely, and seen and experienced their good and bad consequences long, and known the world thoroughly, and being now ready to quit it, can have no farther interest to serve in it, must be of great weight, in confirmation of what reason and religion teach: especially if it be delivered with prudence and mildness, and proper demonstrations of true good-will. Nor can there be a nobler way of spending the conclusion of life than to exert all our abilities, and all the credit that we have acquired through the former part of it, in doing the most important service to those whom we shall leave behind us: to redeem our own miscarriages by reclaiming others; to warn the unthinking, confirm the unsteady, and give public testimony, on full trial, to the cause of God and goodness.

But then, besides testifying in general, that this is the way to happiness, the aged have many advantages for recommending more particularly, sometimes one duty, sometimes another, as need shall be. And besides what men usually call duties, there are other things, no less really so, which they who have once gained respect may easily induce many of those who know them, to practise to their great benefit: that prudence, which preserves from sin the best way, by preventing temptation: that reasonableness of temper and propriety of behaviour, in every common incident, which habituate men to the same temper and behaviour on occasions of importance. Nay, things that contribute nothing to the morals of men, if they be conducive in any way to their convenience or innocent delight, it belongs to the wisdom of the aged to be diligent in teaching: and whatever they have perceived in life to be either good or bad, they are bound to

admonish others to do or avoid: that so, when the time comes, they may give up the world to those that follow them, if possible, better than they found it; or however, as little worse as they can in every respect.

These then are the directions, which virtue and religion furnish, to make *the hoary head a crown of glory*. What remains is to shew,

II. That, would we but observe them carefully and prudently, they must be effectual to that end: as, far, I mean, as in the present state of things, any instrument almost can be depended on for attaining any purpose. And the proof of this will lie in a small compass.

It is no wonder in the least that those persons are destitute both of honour and comfort in their old age, who have neither prepared as they ought for it, nor will behave as they ought in it. But to have borne the various trials of a long life (many of them, God knows, very hard and difficult) with a spirit and a conduct well suited to each, and be still going through the remainder in the same manner; or at least, after deviating for a time to have returned into the right way again; with a genuine concern for having ever forsaken it, and to be now making amends by more exemplary goodness for past failings: these are characters intitled to universal esteem. And though length of time may wear off superficial ornaments, yet the solid merit of disinterestedness and equitable bounty, mildness and good temper, sobriety, modesty, and decency, serious reflection, rational piety towards God, and judicious good-will towards men, shewn in promoting virtue, prudence, and useful knowledge; this under all disadvantages of any other kind, must have charms, to which no one, that is not

void of discernment, can be insensible. *O how comely a thing is judgment for grey hairs, and for ancient men to know counsel! O how comely is the wisdom of old men, and understanding and counsel to men of honour. Much experience is the crown of the aged, and the fear of God is their glory.** At length indeed the mind itself may come to bear great marks of decay, as well as the body. But even then, the very ruins of so beautiful and majestic a structure will be looked on with reverence. And as long as persons in years can enjoy any thing; such regard as this, paid by those about them, in which nature hath wisely and kindly disposed them to take peculiar delight, must support and revive them to a great degree.

But they have further and most valuable satisfactions, that depend not on others at all. As many as have proceeded so far in life with innocence, must feel from it the highest joy: they who have truly repented, cannot fail to be sensible of much consolation. And the delight of recollecting how happy it is, that they were not cut off in their former sins, will more than outweigh their living to undergo not a few sufferings. Besides, if old age brings on some uneasinesses, it removes others. Many passions grow calm then, which formerly, if they did not hurry us into follies and crimes, gave us much trouble to govern them: many afflictions, that once were exceeding bitter, soften by degrees into a pleasing kind of melancholy remembrance. And though, the longer we live, the greater number of mournful spectacles we must see; yet a suitable provision is made in our frame, that as age increases, we are, generally speaking, less and less affected by whatever loss happens to us. Then,

* Ecclus xxv 4, 5, 6.

under the heaviest burthens that we experience, it must surely be some relief to think, that there cannot be a great deal more to come upon us. In the beginning of life we have large room to be apprehensive concerning what may befal us during the course of it. But towards the close, when almost all is got tolerably over, and neither temptations, nor misfortunes, nor dangers, private or public, can give us any long disquiet; to be so near finishing our voyage, and just entering into port, must needs inspire us with great tranquillity and peace of mind. From old age, as from a station of security, men may look back with complacence on the hazards they have escaped, and delight themselves anew in the gratifications they have enjoyed. For to lament their being past, when we have had our due share of them, is both ingratitude and absurdity. Indeed it is a considerable felicity in our make, and seems calculated particularly for the benefit of the aged, that the memory of past pleasures is agreeable, and yet that of past sorrows far from painful.

But farther still; recalling to their thoughts the persons and occurrences they have known, the times that have gone over their heads, and the wonderful dispensations of Providence to themselves or others, with which they have been filled, must be a fruitful source of improving amusement to them; and relating these things, an acceptable entertainment and instruction to others. Years, as they advance, do indeed lessen our activity; but perhaps by no means our usefulness: for to advise and direct is both the superior part, and that for which fewer are qualified, than for executing what is resolved. Or, to put matters at the lowest, how little soever the aged have an opportunity of doing, they have at least that of suffering, as be-

comes good Christians; of bearing the inconveniences of their condition with a cheerful acquiescence; and being content to be useless, if infinite wisdom sees it fit they should. So that the very same infirmities, which disable them from exercising some virtues, directly lead them to exercise others, though not so conspicuous, amongst men, yet as truly valuable in the sight of God, and therefore as sure to increase their reward. Whatever then is the will of their heavenly Father, they are prepared for. If it be his pleasure, that they should languish on here, they have great encouragement to *wait* with patience *all the days of their appointed time till their change come.** And if he calls them soon, they have all possible reason to obey willingly; and yield up their breath with thankfulness into his hands, who hath indulged them so long an use of it, and knows it would be no more a blessing to them. *O Death, acceptable is thy sentence unto him whose strength faileth, that is now in the last age and vexed with all things!*† Well may such resign their spirit quietly to him who gave it, and praise his goodness, that *they go to their grave in a full age, like as a shock of corn cometh in, in its season.*‡

To die, is just as natural as to be born. That *one generation should pass away and another come,*§ is the settled law of things. Our predecessors have made way for us, and it is but fitting, that we should make way for our successors: that they also, in their turn, may enjoy the pleasures of life, and feel its pains; busy themselves, and be talked of; die, and be forgotten. *Fear not* therefore *the sentence of death. Remember them that have been before thee, and that come after thee. For this is the sentence of the Lord over all flesh; and why art thou against the plea-*

* Job xiv. 14. † Ecclus xli. 2. ‡ Job v. 26. § Ecclus i. 4.

*sure of the Most High?** Still it is very true, the manner in which we are to pass out of the present world, though a great part of its terrors are mere imagination, hath yet something in it shocking enough; especially when we consider it as being originally the punishment of sin. And though, at a proper period, we may have a satiety of this earthly life, as well as of other things here: yet to expect the entire loss of our being then, would be a thought of dreadful gloominess; and were this to be our case at death, it must affect thinking persons, on whom that awful change was coming immediately, with a dejection and horror scarce to be borne. But our gracious Redeemer hath *delivered them, who else through fear of death, would all their life-time,* and especially at the close of it, have been *subject to bondage.*† To believers in Him the blessed knowledge of a better state shines forth, totally changes the prospect, and makes our standing on the brink of this life, in truth, the joyfullest situation we were ever in: for what can be better for us, than that *this corruptible should put on incorruption, this mortal immortality?*‡

For the vicious indeed old age hath no comfort, and much terror. There have been few things in their past lives, that can give them pleasure when reflected on; and many, that must give them inexpressible concern. For the proper satisfactions of their present condition, they have never learnt to have any relish; and the thoughts of their approaching one, it will be hard for them to avoid, and yet much harder to support. A most dreadful dilemma: to be weary of this life, yet afraid of the next; and the strongest fears to fall infinitely short of what there is to be feared. But to the aged pious Christian, the consi-

* Ecclus xli. 3, 4. † Heb. ii. 15. ‡ Cor. xv. 53.

deration of hereafter, if dwelt on as it ought, almost annihilates every thing that could disquiet him here. He will never regret that he is no longer qualified for worldly enjoyment, when he thinks of the unspeakable bliss that he knows is at hand, nor faint under worldly afflictions, *which are but for a moment,* since they are *working out for him* so soon *eternal glory.** The punishment prepared for the wicked strike him with no terrors; but the rewards prepared for the righteous fill him with such comfort, that *though his outward man perish, yet his inward man is renewed day by day;*† when *his flesh and his heart faileth,* he triumphs in the declaration, that *God is the strength of his heart, and his portion for ever.*‡ There may possibly have been much wanting hitherto, of the esteem and honour, with which his *hoary head* was entitled to be *crowned;* but now, *having fought the good fight and finished his course, henceforth there is assuredly laid up for him a crown of righteousness, which the Lord the righteous Judge shall give him at that day.*§

* 2 Cor. iv. 17. † 2 Cor. iv. 16. ‡ Ps. lxxiii. 26.
§ 2 Tim. iv. 7, 8.

SERMON VII.

1 TIM. iv. 17, 18.

CHARGE THEM THAT ARE RICH IN THIS WORLD, THAT THEY BE NOT HIGH-MINDED, NOR TRUST IN UNCERTAIN RICHES, BUT IN THE LIVING GOD, WHO GIVETH US RICHLY ALL THINGS TO ENJOY: THAT THEY DO GOOD, THAT THEY BE RICH IN GOOD WORKS, READY TO DISTRIBUTE, WILLING TO COMMUNICATE.

EVERY condition of life hath its peculiar dangers to be avoided, and duties to be done, but none hath dangers more threatening, or duties more important, than that of the rich and great: whose situation, notwithstanding, is seldom considered by those who are in it, as having any thing to be feared; and is generally imagined by others, to comprehend almost every thing, that is to be wished. Now the mistakes even of the lower part of the world concerning this matter are attended with some exceeding bad consequences; disposing them very unreasonably to envy their superiors, and be uneasy at their own lot. But the mistakes of the rich and great themselves concerning the advantages and obligations of their station, produce the most fatal effects that can be, on themselves and all around them. And it greatly adds to the unhappiness of their case, that whilst they have many things to divert their attention from what is right, and prompt them to what is wrong; to make the gratifying of their bad inclinations easy; and support them in the world, let them act as they will; they have commonly scarce any one

to remind them if they act amiss. Intimations of misbehaviour, however prudently given, are to most persons disagreeable: but to persons of rank they appear disrespectful too. And such of them as will bear to be told of their managing their healths or their fortunes ill, shew a great reluctance to let their conduct, in point of religion or morals, be touched with any seriousness. So that, just where they need admonition most, they have the least given them. It is but few, that can with propriety use freedom enough with them to do any good: for, to slight and distant hints they think no serious regard is due. And amongst those that can, there are fewer yet that will undertake an office, in which they have little prospect either of success or thanks. Indeed the generality of those that come about them, in all likelihood, mean nothing but their own interest, or their own amusement: and these, they may be sure, will take care never to offend them by giving them good advice: but there is much cause to suspect, what the great, notwithstanding, seldom do suspect, that they will often court them by giving them bad: or, if they do not directly persuade them into sin, (which might sometimes be too gross behaviour) will however more covertly dispose them to it; encourage and countenance them in it; either to bring about some particular end, which they have to serve by it, or with a general view of making themselves agreeable.

To be thus environed with temptations, and probably sensible of none of them, is a most pitiable condition. And yet the rich and great, when they are led wrong, do not so deserve compassion, as not to deserve much blame too. For as there are some things to excuse their faults, there are many that aggravate them. Their education, so costly and laboured in

several respects, must have been conducted with the absurdest negligence in the most material; if it hath not given them a much superior knowledge of their duty, to that which common persons can usually acquire. Their disengagement afterwards from cares, that others are swallowed up in, affords them peculiar leisure for thought and recollection: and the vast and evident importance of their whole behaviour, on such a multitude of accounts, one should think could not fail of engaging their attention to every step they take. So that if they have fewer occasional admonitions given them; it might be hoped they would have less need of them: for their very situation admonishes them constantly, that they are raised by Providence above others, in order to be authors and examples of good, not evil, to their fellow-creatures. This is directly their business and trust: it is the noblest and happiest that can be. The labours of it are softened by many honourable and pleasing distinctions, which God hath bestowed on them; for which he will justly expect they shall make him a return: if it be such as it ought, they will be eminent for ever in the next world, as well as for a few days in this: and how can persons be excusable, that are uninfluenced by such considerations?

It is very true, our Saviour doth express in very strong terms, the difficulty of a rich man's entering into the kingdom of Heaven. But he means, of such a one's professing himself a subject of Christ: which required uncommon resolution at that time, when all worldly advantages were to be given up, and the bitterest persecutions undergone for the sake of the gospel. Yet even then no man was excused, either from embracing or practising christianity: much less now. And if at all times the

great have temptations beyond others, they have also reasons beyond others for struggling with them, and will be rewarded beyond others for overcoming them. Therefore St. Paul in the text gives them no dispensations, but only provides for them stronger warnings; and instead of authorising the ministers of God's word to wink at their faults, requires that they admonish them with singular earnestness to perform their duties; the only prerogative in relation to this matter that can be allowed them. But as in general the least offensive, and therefore most efficacious way of admonishing, is by public instruction, we usually confine ourselves to that; and the upper part of mankind ought to attend upon it more constantly, and hearken to it more seriously, in proportion as they are less likely to be told their faults and their dangers, in private, to good purpose: and should *suffer the word of exhortation** to be given with greater plainness and freedom to them all in common, the greater objections there are against taking any considerable liberties with each of them singly.

And as those of middle rank, may yet when compared with their inferiors, be considered as highly exalted, and do accordingly consider themselves as such: all degrees above the lowest, are concerned to observe the Apostle's charge: and the very lowest will find their own failures, and their own obligations intermixed of course, with what will be said about those of their betters.

Now the peculiar dangers of the rich and great (for though the Apostle names only the former, the connection is so close that he may well be understood to mean both) arises either from the eminence of their station, or the abundance of their wealth: and there-

* Heb. xiii. 22.

fore the text points a caution against each. But I shall be able at present to treat only of the first: which is, *that they be not high-minded.*

Every superiority, of every sort, which men only imagine themselves possessed of, is too liable both to be over-rated and improperly used. But superior fortune and condition are advantages so visible to all eyes, create such dependencies, and give such influence; that it is no wonder, if they tempt to uncommon haughtiness. Even such as rise to them by accident, are so eager to have all the world acknowledge them to be what they are just become, that they often quite forget what they were a while before. Such as acquire them by their own application and abilities, hardly ever fail to think very highly of themselves on that account. And they who are born to them, usually set out from the first with despising those beneath them: as indeed to be descended from ancestors of note; to bear a name which others have been accustomed to respect; to enjoy perhaps hereditary honours, and on every occasion to be addressed in other language, than is used to the vulgar sort of men; these things are enough to overset the minds of the weak: and they have some degree of wrong effect upon most; more, perhaps, than they themselves are sensible of.

Now undoubtedly distinguished rank is intitled to distinguished regard: and the good order of society very much depends on keeping up that regard: and therefore the great should in a proper manner be much more careful to keep it up, than many of them are. For indeed their condescensions and familiarities, are often with such very wrong persons, and in such very wrong ways, that preserving an over-distant behaviour would, of the two, be much the better, both for them-

selves and those whom they are pleased to honour with their intimacy. But when they nurse up the consciousness of their own superiority into a contemptuous neglect of others, and insolent expectations of unfit submissions from them; they have great need to be reminded, that respect is paid to wealth and birth, because the common good requires it, not because the persons who receive it, are always worthy of it: and when they are unworthy, they have much more reason to be humble on their own account, than vain on account of their estates or of their ancestors. The wise and good indeed will shew them the outward regard, which they are entitled: but inward they must expect from none, except the weak and inconsiderate: nor will the false appearances of it from the artful and interested do them any service: but their dishonourable behaviour will be the more conspicuous for their honourable station.

And even supposing them guilty of nothing else to lessen the esteem they claim: yet claiming too much of it, or too openly, will frustrate their intention most effectually. For neither equals nor inferiors will suffer near so much to be extorted from them, as they would have bestowed most freely on their own accord. Haughtiness therefore towards all, who are not absolute dependants, is a most ridiculous thing; and to such as are it is a very imprudent one. For the highest lie greatly at the mercy even of those who serve them, and attend upon them; in respect of their characters, their credit and weight in the world, their fortunes, their ease, their very safety. And therefore to treat those, who are ever so much at our command, with such humanity and affability, as may secure their good opinion and good-will, is mere common honest policy.

But one sort of condescension to inferiors may be of peculiar advantage; I mean, listening to useful information and advice from them: things which the great are very apt to think themselves above, when every one else sees they have much need of them. *The rich man,* as Solomon observes, *is wise in his own conceit: but the poor, that hath understanding, searcheth him out**. Neither affluence, nor high rank, by any means imply superiority of judgment; or if they did, the best judgments often want to be instructed in the nature and circumstances of what they are to judge upon; and indeed to be guarded against the mistakes, to which inexperience, inadvertence, or unseen prejudices, may expose them. And the more important any matter is, and the less carefully and seriously we have weighed it, the more necessity there evidently appears, that we should hear others in relation to it. How attentively then should the greatest hear the appointed teachers of religion: the *one thing needful*† to their eternal happiness; and perhaps the very thing that many of them have hitherto considered the least, yet possibly set themselves the most to despise and ridicule! But in their worldly affairs too, it might prevent innumerable errors and distresses, if they would vouchsafe, on fit occasions, to receive and encourage lessons of wisdom from those beneath them. This, you will easily discern, is a very different matter from being led and governed: to which the most self-sufficient of men, under artful management, are often the most subject. It is governing ourselves by exerting the rational powers, which God hath given us, instead of being slaves to our passions and fancies. We cannot alter truth: and therefore, how exalted soever our condition be, we

* Prov. xxviii. 11. † Luke x. 42.

should think it no disgrace, but the highest honour, to submit to it. Nor is the obligation of doing so in the least different, whether we discover it ourselves, or learn it from others. If reason hath at all a right to direct us; it hath an equal right, whencesoever it comes. And the most truly considerable persons have always been the readiest to follow the opinion of such, as were in all respects their inferiors, whenever they happened to be in the right. Nor is there perhaps any part of humility, that can give us more reputation than this, or do us more service.

But if humility in the great could be no other way beneficial to them; yet avoiding the guilt of so injurious a behaviour, as indulging a proud spirit prompts them to, is surely a motive important enough. Hence it is, that instead of *learning* forgiveness of *him,* who was *meek and lowly in heart,** they often resent offences of very small consequence, nay, undesigned ones, very immoderately; and some, even to the demanding of the blood of others at the hazard of their own. And though perhaps they themselves began the injury, yet they imagine their honour binds them to violate the laws of God and man in order to revenge it: which absurd notion they have patronized in the world, till persons, so far beneath them, have taken it up, that one should hope they might be induced to lay it down for that reason, if not for better. But the haughtiness of the great, without being combined with anger, doth in cold blood infinite mischief. And they should consider, that it is the same aggravation of the fault, if one who is justly possessed of superiority already, unjustly affects more; as it would be in the rich to pilfer and rob. In countries of legal liberty indeed, there is not so much room, for the pride of the

* Mat. xi. 29.

upper part of the world to bear hard upon the lower. And truly both may thank God for it: the one that they are thus delivered from the temptation; the other from the suffering. For very dreadful is both the wickedness and the misery, to which unlimited power leads: and Solomon describes the latter very pathetically: *I returned and considered all the oppressions that are done under the Sun: and behold, the fears of such as were oppressed, and they had no comforter: and on the side of their oppressors was power; but they had no comforter. Wherefore I praised the dead, that are already dead, more than the living, which are yet alive. Yea, better is he, than both they, which hath not yet been; and hath not seen the evil work, that is done under the Sun.** But though a merciful Providence hath preserved this nation, freer than any other, from such extremities; yet every where the rich and great make their inferiors suffer a great deal too much; sometimes by a designed and studied haughtiness, often by a careless and contemptuous one, which renders them inattentive to what those in lower life may feel; when perhaps from principle, such as it is, they would avoid doing injuries to their equals, and are by no means without tenderness towards them.

Thus too many treat their tenants hardly, or permit them to be so treated: sometimes indeed from avarice; sometimes from the urgency of wants which follies and vices have created; but frequently, from not thinking it worth while to inquire, whether such mean creatures are well or ill used, and refusing to be troubled with their complaints and remonstrances; which, though often groundless, may often likewise be very just. Now were we in this wretched case, we

* Eccl. iv. 1, 2, 3.

should soon discern it to be extremely cruel in our superiors, to imagine us undeserving of being regarded and eased in bad times, or under the pressure of unexpected accidents; to indulge their own love of money, or keep up their idle expensiveness to the full, whatever we and our families might undergo, whose labour must pay for all; to throw new burthens upon us, not because we were able to bear them, but because they were unwilling; to subject us, without redress, to the partialities and resentments of their agents, or crush us under the weight of their own; obliging us perhaps to seek a livelihood elsewhere to our certain loss and probable ruin, if at any time we were less obsequious to them than they required, though on occasions where we ought to be left free. Such behaviour all men would think exceedingly barbarous, were they to experience it: and therefore all should resolve never to be guilty of it, and apply to this case amongst others, that admirable exhortation of the Son of Sirach: *Make not an hungry soul sorrowful; neither provoke a man in his distress: reject not the supplication of the afflicted, neither turn away thy face from a poor man. Turn not away thine eye from the needy, and give him no occasion to curse thee. For if he curse thee in the bitterness of his soul, his prayer shall be heard of him that made him.—Let it not grieve thee to bow down thine ear to the poor; and give him a friendly answer, with meekness.**

Another sort of persons, for whom superiors too commonly will not vouchsafe to have the consideration that they ought, are those who come to them upon business. Obliging such to an unreasonable attendance, making them wait long, and it may be return often, (when perhaps only idleness, or caprice, or oc-

* Ecclus iv. 2, 4, 5, 6, 8.

cupations that might well be interrupted, prevent their being dispatched immediately) is a very provoking and a very injurious kind of stateliness. Time ought to be precious to all men; and is peculiarly precious to those, who have affairs and appointments to fill it with, that either must be attended on, each in its season, or they and theirs must suffer, perhaps be undone. And were it considered, but near so much as it ought, how very large a share of the time of others, a few of these proud or thoughtless men are sufficient to consume, it would be found a matter of no small seriousness.

But there is another fault still worse frequently joined with this; deeming it beneath their notice, whether such of their inferiors, as have just and reasonable demands upon them, are paid when they ought. At the same time they would think it infamous not to pay, what they lose to the vilest wretch in the pernicious practice of gaming, though the law, for the public good, discourages and almost forbids their doing it. Notwithstanding which, by a monstrous perversion of language, they call these last their debts of honour, in opposition to the former. It is very true, that motives, not at all akin to pride, frequently induce those of high rank to neglect or even refuse satisfying their creditors. But so far as they take liberties in this respect, which, were they less considerable in the world, they would not dare to take, and probably would not think of taking; so far their injustice arises from a haughty confidence in their own greatness, and a contemptuous indifference, to what inconveniencies and difficulties they expose others. There needs but a little consideration to see, what exquisite distresses such a conduct must produce; and how pitiable the situation of those poor people must be; who, on pain of losing all their business, dare not re-

fuse credit; and yet are in a likely way to be ruined, if they give it. The common method of saving themselves, I fear, is, by making unreasonable gains from the good part of their customers, to indemnify themselves for the delays, and often final disappointments, which they meet with from the bad. But this is plainly punishing such as use them well, for the faults of others who use them ill: a behaviour of which no one should be guilty, and therefore no one should be driven to it; but least of all by those, whose circumstances either do or might exempt them the most intirely from any necessity of such injustice. The care of being punctual in the discharge of their debts, and considerate for that purpose, in comparing their income and expences, and attentive to keep the latter within the compass of the former, far from being below the greatest, enables them to shew themselves truly great on many occasions, when otherwise they could not: but the figure which they make in the eyes of mankind, amidst all their splendor, for the want of this care; and the poor arts, to which they are obliged to condescend, for quieting their creditors, and supporting their extravagances, are extremely unsuitable to a station, that claims distinguished respect.

Another very blamable, and very pernicious instance of high-mindedness in the great, is, imagining the management of their families an attention too low for them. Even that of their children they very commonly despise to an astonishing degree. And yet think it no dishonour, to throw away on every trifle and folly, that they can hunt out, many of those hours, a few of which might do a great deal towards making life a blessing, (which now through their fault is often a curse) to those whom they have brought into it. Or if they have humility enough to inspect some part of

their education, it is usually the outward and shewy, but least material part: and they would be ashamed of the supposition of their taking any serious pains, to plant in them those principles of religion and virtue, on learning which the present and future happiness of their children depends; and their own, on teaching them. If persons can treat the very *fruit of their body** in such a manner; no wonder, if the servants under their roof are treated amiss. And yet a tender regard to the meanest of them is unquestionably the duty of the highest of those who employ them. For our common humanity requires, that their disadvantageous condition be not rendered more so than it needs, either by design or negligence, of which nature hath given them as strong a feeling as their betters. And therefore, of our own accord, we should inquire and consider about them: when they offer complaints, we should receive them; and if there be some impropriety in the manner of making them, pass over that, as proceeding perhaps from ignorance, perhaps from a present sense of suffering; look to the substance of what they alledge, and grant them due redress. Again, when they seem to be in a fault, we should submit to hear patiently, and examine equitably, every plea they have to make. For there may be circumstances of no small weight, in their favour, both as to what they remonstrate about, and what they are accused of, which we may not have rightly understood or considered; and therefore should permit them to be laid before us. Otherwise we treat them as unworthy of common justice, and incur that guilt, which Job hath expressed in such affecting words, that they can never be omitted, when this subject is mentioned. *If I did despise the cause of my man-servant, or my maid-servant, when*

* Micah vi. 7.

*they contended with me; what shall I do when God riseth up, and when he visiteth, what shall I answer him? Did not he that made me, make him: and did not one fashion us in the womb?**

I am very sensible, that entering in person too minutely into the particulars of every small domestic concern, may sit ill upon people of rank; and perhaps be inconsistent with their attention to affairs of more importance. But so far as they can with any propriety look into things, they should be careful, not only to behave mildly and equitably to their servants themselves, but to see that they behave so one to another. For in large families especially, there are sometimes dreadful grievances of this kind: and requisite subordination may be sufficiently preserved, without either countenancing or permitting oppression.

Not that, under colour of gentleness to them, we should suffer them to live uncontrolled, and to do as they please. This would be a false good nature, and extensively pernicious. We may think perhaps, that we shall hurt nobody by it, but ourselves; and even this we ought not to do. But indeed, along with ourselves, we shall hurt the fortunes, it may be the morals too, of those who ought to be dearest to us; for wicked servants are dangerous corrupters: we shall set an example of ill management in our own families, which will make it more difficult for others to manage theirs well: and we shall do the greatest prejudice of all to those, who will probably at present the least complain of it; I mean the poor wretches, whom we indulge so wrongly. For it is hardly to be hoped, but that our negligence about their conduct, will tempt them, either to be dishonest, or idle, or wasteful, in our service; or vicious and dissolute; or however,

* Job xxxi. 13, 14, 15.

forgetful of their duty to God. And we owe it to them, as we have taken them under our care, to preserve them, if we can, from all these sins; to direct their steps in the ways of religion and virtue; and not expose them to ruin here, and misery hereafter, for want of vouchsafing to look a little after them: a shocking instance of haughtiness in relation to *our brethren for whom Christ died.**

I have enlarged so long on these particulars, in which the upper part of the world are too *high-minded*, to attend to their duty; that I must comprehend the rest in a very few words; which I beg all, who are concerned, to reflect upon more distinctly, and apply to themselves impartially. Whoever makes his rank or his wealth a privilege, either to say or do things to any one that are injurious or unbecoming; or to omit things that are right and good: whoever makes use of his inferiors for his own advantage or amusement, to their inconvenience, and neglects them when he hath done: whoever expects more from them, in any respect, than he hath a reasonable claim to; or makes his superiority, by the ostentation of it, painful, or by the misuse of it detrimental, justly falls under the Apostle's charge, as a *high-minded* offender against man and God. And though offences of this kind are heinous in all persons, yet they are peculiarly so in Christians; whose rule, which they profess to follow, is: *Be kindly affectioned one to another, with brotherly love; in honour preferring one another: mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate.*† *Let nothing be done through strife or vain glory, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves. Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*

* 1 Cor. viii. 11. † Rom. xii. 10, 16.

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who being in the form of God, took on him the form of a servant, and humbled himself unto death, even the death of the cross. All of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.†*

* Phil. ii. 3—8. † 1 Pet. v. 5.

SERMON VIII.

1 TIM. vi. 17, 18.

CHARGE THEM THAT ARE RICH IN THIS WORLD, THAT THEY BE NOT HIGH-MINDED, NOR TRUST IN UNCERTAIN RICHES, BUT IN THE LIVING GOD, WHO GIVETH US RICHLY ALL THINGS TO ENJOY: THAT THEY DO GOOD, THAT THEY BE RICH IN GOOD WORKS, READY TO DISTRIBUTE, WILLING TO COMMUNICATE.

IN this passage the Apostle requires the ministers of God's word, first, to caution persons of wealth and rank against the sins of which they are peculiarly in danger: then to lay before them the duties, to which they are peculiarly bound. I have endeavoured already to obey his injunction, in relation to the former of the two sins, which he specifies, that of *being high-minded;* and now proceed to the latter, *trusting in uncertain riches:* which phrase comprehends placing the happiness of life either in wealth itself, or in those pleasures and amusements, which it is commonly made the instrument of procuring. The prohibition therefore of doing this extends to regulate the acquisition, the possession and use of a great fortune: and to go through the subject fully, each of these points must be considered.

1. The acquisition. In speculation it seems hardly to be expected, that any one, who is once master of enough to answer his real and reasonable wants, should feel any desire almost, on his own account, of having

more: that he should take much pains about it, is very wonderful; and that he should do any thing wrong for it, quite unaccountable. But that they, who have superfluous wealth already, should both disquiet themselves and injure others merely to obtain a larger superfluity, is incredibly absurd. And yet, in fact, these are the persons whose passion for augmenting their incomes is usually the strongest. *When riches increase, set not your heart upon them,* is the caution of Scripture;* and accordingly the son of Sirach pronounces, *blessed is the rich, that is found without blemish, and hath not gone after gold. Who is he? and we will call him blessed; for wonderful things hath he done among his people. Who hath been tried thereby, and found perfect? then let him glory.*† For indeed neither the mean nor the unjust things, to which necessity prompts the poor, are to be compared with those, which persons, far above necessity, will notwithstanding do for gain. Too many there are, who seem to account their follies and their vices in the number of things necessary; and though they have abundantly sufficient to live according to their rank, provided they would live prudently and virtuously, will submit to acquire, by wicked means, what they want only to support them in wicked courses. And others, though unable to find out either good or bad uses for what they have already, yet are not at all the less eager for adding more to it; but will do almost any thing to enlarge, what they enjoy nothing from, except, as Solomon observes, *beholding it with their eyes;*‡ and he hath observed further, that *the eye is not satisfied with seeing.*§ Desires increase continually, and cares along with them. Such acqui-

* Ps. lxii. 10. † Ecclus xxxi. 8, 9, 10. ‡ Eccl. v. 11.
§ Ibid. i. 8. Comp. iv. 8. v. 10.

sitions cannot really promote even their present happiness; or supposing they could, yet if using unfair or low arts to serve their own interests be excusable in the wealthy, in whom is it that any thing is inexcusable? No temptation is a warrant for doing wrong; but to do wrong, without any thing that deserves the name of a temptation, is exceedingly bad. And it cannot be nature, but merely an absurd habit, willfully indulged, that tempts men to accumulate what they have no need of.

But though riches alone render eagerness for more very blameable and unbecoming, yet greatness added to them doubles the fault. For exalted rank absolutely calls for the exercise of honourable disinterestedness. And there are several things, in strictness, very lawful and honest, which yet are beneath people of condition; who, as far as they can with any tolerable prudence, ought ever to avoid the shadow of a mean action; and leave no room for the imputation of being misled by sordid motives in any part of life. For who shall set the example of resisting such considerations, if they give way to them? And yet what sort of example is there more needful or more beneficial? Not that people of birth and fortune ought to think themselves above all views, either of private advantage or of due recompence for their public services. This, in many cases, would be a false and romantic delicacy; unreasonably detrimental to themselves and their families, and productive of no benefit, but harm, to the world around them. But in every case, to act with a steady regard to truth and right and common good, and, without hesitation, to prefer their character before their interest, when they interfere, is indeed the general duty of all men, but of the rich and great above all. Whoever violates it in private life is almost

sure to contract an infamy, that will make his gains a dear purchase. And in affairs of a more public nature the guilt at least is the same; often greater, as the mischief done, or however the bad example set, is more extensive. I am very sensible how common it is for men of seriousness and worth in other respects, not to consider these things as matter of conscience at all, and accordingly to take strange liberties in relation to them. But a little impartial reflection would soon shew, that both reason and religion prohibit the obstructing of useful measures by opposition, forwarding bad ones by subserviency, encouraging wickedness or worthlessness, departing from justice and equity, for any selfish or any party end whatever. Were even a general good proposed to be served by it, *evil* is not to be *done that good may come;** nor will any come from it that would not have been more effectually obtained, and longer preserved, by other means. And as for good merely personal, whoever aims at that by methods hurtful to his country, whatever outward advantages he may get by it, will lose all title to peace within. And it will be found, if not soon, yet, which is worse, too late, that his own interest, and that of his posterity are so connected with the interest of the whole, that all advantages, made by a behaviour inconsistent with it, will be truly *uncertain riches*, as the text calls them: will *make themselves wings and fly away*,† in the time of general calamity; or perhaps long before in the preceding general wickedness, which he hath been instrumental in hastening on; and then reproach and shame will be the only portion left to him or his. But how righteous soever the acquisition of their wealth may have been, the *rich in this world* have need that a charge be given them,

* Rom. iii. 8. † Prov. xxiii. 5.

2. Concerning the possession of it. In the possession alone, some of them seem to have placed the whole of its value; *making* literally, as Job expresses it, *gold their hope, and saying to the fine gold, thou art my confidence**: and neither employing it to any benefit of their own, nor of any one else. Now keeping a heap of wealth, merely for the sake of keeping it, is an apparent absurdity. Keeping it, merely for the repute of having it, is a very low inducement. And if laying up against future accidents be pretended, a moderate store will suffice for a reasonable security, and nothing can secure us absolutely. Indeed the larger the fortune, the more room for accidents, in one part or another of it; and the loss of a small part will be as grievous to a heart set upon riches, as that of a larger to another man. Besides, whoever lives only to the purpose of saving and accumulating will be tempted by this ruling passion to a sinful neglect of the poor and the worthy among his friends and dependants, perhaps among his relations and very children. For that important obligation of *providing for their own, and specially for those of their own house*, (on which St. Paul, in the chapter before the text†, hath laid so great a stress, and which the covetous imagine, or pretend, they are so faithfully performing) doth not consist at all in hoarding up for them as much as they can, but in bestowing upon them as much as they need. This not only the context proves and the use of the original word in other authors, but the nature of the thing. For whoever is in want of any thing requisite, is evidently unprovided for, how much wealth soever another may say he keeps for him, whilst he really keeps it from him. And when any one hath made provision enough for those who peculiarly belong to him, to put them in a way

* Job xxxi. 24. † 1 Tim. v. 8.

suitable to their condition, he can seldom be bound, and is not always at liberty, to do more. The care of them indeed is the first demand upon him; yet after this is sufficiently taken, and even while it is taking, there may be many other most equitable claims; and they are all of them intitled to a proportionable regard by that general precept of reason, as well as Scripture, *withhold not good from them to whom it is due, when it is in the power of thy hand to do it**. Some occasions present themselves to every one, and frequent occasions to the rich and great, on which extending acts of liberality far beyond the narrow bounds of a family, is indeed but discharging a debt; which the participation in common of human nature brings upon us, and he that *hath made us all of one blood*† expects we shall pay. Nor will he fail to impute it for heinous guilt, at the day of judgment; (as our Saviour hath given us awful warning) if they whom he hath particularly qualified for works of charity, and expressly appointed the stewards and dispensers of what he hath bestowed on them purposely for that end, shall, in breach of so sacred a trust, confine to themselves the bounty which was placed in their hands, that all around them might receive a proper share of it.

But some of the higher part of mankind adventure to go still greater lengths than this, to preserve the possession of what they have: detain from others, without scruple, what even in legal justice they are intitled to; and defend themselves against the demand of it on the advantage ground of their wealth, or their rank and station, which render it often difficult and expensive, sometimes impossible for their inferiors to obtain redress. A most ungenerous, dishonest, tyrannical use of the prerogatives of their condition! Every one must see it to be

* Prov. iii. 27. † Acts xvii. 26.

so: and they, upon whom the eyes of every one are fixed, should have no little regard to this consideration, amongst others that are still weightier. The privileges granted by law to some were granted for the security of the public good, not the patronage of private oppression. And those which others take to themselves, of awing or ruining, by the superiority of their fortune or their credit, such as presume to think of recovering what is denied them, are contrary to the whole intent of law and of human society. Not to say, that whoever hath a spark of true greatness, will be desirous to put any one, with whom he hath a controversy, fairly on the level for an equitable decision of it, and will say, with Elihu in Job, *if thou canst answer me, set thy words in order before me, stand up. Behold, my terror shall not make thee afraid, neither shall my hand be heavy upon thee**.

But perhaps they will plead, that the demands, which they refuse to satisfy, are unjust impositions. And without question, if that be really and evidently so, they not only are warranted to stand out themselves, but ought to protect others in doing it, as far as they properly can. But then, it is never allowable to make this plea, without being satisfied of its truth; and men cannot be reasonably satisfied of any thing, concerning which they have not impartially sought for full information, and coolly considered it. They may have entertained suspicions, they may have heard reports, they may have received positive assurances, perhaps from the prejudiced, perhaps from the ignorant; but these things, without knowing what the other side hath to answer, are no foundations at all to determine upon, in matters of property: where it should ever be observed, as a general rule, that though

* Job xxxiii. 5, 7.

we are indeed concerned to inquire what demands are ill grounded, and reject them; yet we are much more concerned to inquire what are well grounded, and comply with them. Our interest is only at stake in one case, and often a very small interest too; but our honour and conscience in the other. For whoever presumes, in any matter, to say, he will not do what justice or equity requires he should do, may in other respects be a worthy man, but in this he is very blamable: and were the same temper to influence his whole conduct, he would be completely wicked. Indeed, to say the truth, unjustly withholding things is much the same crime as unjustly taking them away. And whoever is in reality, as well as name, a man of honour, were it ever so much in his power, by his own authority, or the complaisance of others, to procure himself unequitable profits or savings, without any possibility of controul; will not endeavour, will not permit that a preference or favour, injurious to any one person in the world, shall ever be shewn him. He will check the baseness of those who would pay court to him by such vile practices, and obviate the fears of such as apprehend they may displease him by acting uprightly, where it makes against him. Far from contriving or desiring to be eased at the expence of those beneath him, he will require to be put on no better a footing than other men; and to be charged with his full share of the burthens of society, since he receives his full share of its benefits. No matter, that while he behaves thus, others, and it may be those of his own rank, will not fail to behave very differently, nor he perhaps to be a sufferer by it. He will be content, if they please to have it so, that seeking and enjoying unfair advantages shall be their character; and refusing and despising them, his.

But besides the sins, which may be committed in the getting or keeping of wealth, there are

3. Others, committed too frequently in using it; which persons of superior rank and fortune must be charged to avoid, and which undoubtedly the text comprehends. For *putting their trust in riches,* is just as much the description of those who place the happiness of life in the enjoyment of large estates, as those who place it in the possession of them. Nay indeed, as a very great part of the antient wealth consisted immediately in plenty of those things, which give pleasure in the consumption of them; so voluptuousness, which surely the apostle would not omit on this occasion, was perhaps more especially designed to be forbidden than rapaciousness, or excessive parsimony. And it confirms this, that when our Saviour was cautioning his hearers against *laying up treasure for themselves,* instead of *being rich towards God;* the parable by which he chose to do it, was that of a person, who having, as he thought, abundant provision of *good* things *for many years,* determined upon it from thenceforth to *take his ease, eat, drink, and be merry**. Now this man is the representative of a numerous multitude, who agree intirely in his general scheme, though they differ from each other in several particulars.

Some trust in their riches so very inconsiderately, that they trust there will never be an end of them, let them be squandered as extravagantly as they will. So they set out with gratifying themselves in every thing, and looking after nothing; till, having been the admiration of the weak, and the pity of the wise for a few years, and contributed to undo their equals by their example, and their

* Luke xii. 17, 21.

inferiors by the honour of employing and not paying them; they are reduced from the grandeur, which they should not have affected, to difficulties that they need never have known. But they will feel them now the more severely for their preceding indulgences, and yet perhaps will be tempted to plunge forward, through meanness and wickedness, into deeper ruin, instead of retreating as soon as they perceived their mistake: which last if they would do, with an ingenuous acknowledgment of it, they would deserve to be treated with much tenderness, as having erred only through inexperience, and thoughtless levity, not ill design.

Others, if they do not dissipate their estates in so wild a manner, yet use them principally to minister to their sensuality and debauchery; vices, which men of superior fortune somehow imagine they have a sort of right to be guilty of: and men of superior rank behave, too many of them, as if they had no other end of their being. Commonly they do so in the beginning of life, and, in truth, not uncommonly to the end of it. Yet it is evident, beyond denial, that reason no more allows, and inclination no more excuses, these things in the highest of mankind than the lowest; and were all mankind to practise them without restraint, there would be no living in the world. Indeed there is not any degree of vicious practice, but hath its proportionable degree of mischief, to some one or another following it; especially as one wrong step leads on imperceptibly, and at last, (as the guilty are apt to think) unavoidably, to many others: and thus the most harmless and best-natured vices in appearance, produce perhaps the cruellest injuries. But the fatal effects of sensual indulgences and dissolute pleasures on the healths, the fortunes, the usefulness, the repu-

tations, the peace of those who give way to them, on the quiet and prosperity of families, on the good order and strength of civil society; are so obvious in themselves, so often insisted on from this place, and so universally acknowledged, (how little soever the acknowledgment influences men) that there can be no need to enlarge on them at present. And were they much less notorious than they are; yet, since God hath been pleased to interpose his peremptory commands in a case where surely he may; and to deliver by express revelation such rules for the government of every appetite, as his infinite wisdom saw to be fit; it behoves the greatest of those, who presume to transgress the limits which he hath set them, to consider well with themselves what plea they will make to him another day for so doing. That nature prompts them to it, is not always a truth; for their excesses are often a perversion, a force upon nature: and it is never a justification, unless it be justifiable for men to do every thing to which they are inclined: when yet they shew perpetually, that they can, if they please, curb their strongest inclinations of this sort, on motives far less considerable than those of religion. And for the remaining excuse of general custom, what is wrong for one to do is wrong for more; and God will not dispense with his laws, merely because a number of his creatures join to disobey them: besides that persons of rank are bound, both in honour and duty, to set the example, not to follow it blindfold. Examples of vice they have set, till those about them and beneath them have learned much more of it than their superiors, I believe, wish they had; but they must wish in vain, till they change their own conduct. And indeed, the men of condition especially, have left no room for any of themselves to make a distinguished

figure in wickedness, without becoming abandoned to the most shocking and pernicious degrees of it; nor hardly then. But by a virtuous example they may be most honourably singular; for the esteem of goodness is still general, however rare the practice be. And not only the sober part of mankind, but the bulk of the immoral, (though doubtless more delighted with such as keep them in countenance, and often poorly affecting to ridicule others) yet, do, and must, inwardly, both respect and envy the worthy few, who adorn exalted rank by an uniform regularity of life, in the midst of every temptation to the contrary.

Another very bad use of wealth, in which too many seem to place (if one may judge from the vehemence with which they pursue it) no small part of their happiness, is that of gaming. Whence it arises, that so strange a passion fixes itself so deep in the hearts of such numbers, is hard to say; whether it be an absurd covetousness, an unmeaning fondness for victory, a groundless persuasion of superior skill, an idle conceit of being favoured by fortune, or a wretched longing to get rid any how of unwelcome thoughts and tedious hours. Whatever be its origin, its effects are most fatal. That all play is at all times, and to all persons, either unlawful or inexpedient, I would by no means affirm. But that very often it is so, cannot be denied; and every one, who takes a share in it, should consider seriously the nature and tendency of what he doth. If it inclines him to passionate, and perhaps prophane expressions; if it inwardly agitates his mind, sours his temper, or wastes his spirits; if it tempts him to any sort or degree of fraud or unfairness; if it mixes him with company dangerous or unsuitable to him; if it devours more time than is consistent with a due attention to the business of his sta-

tion, public or private, or to the regular order of his family; if it takes up any part of the time that ought to be spent in religious recollection of his ways, or other improvement of his soul at home in piety and virtue; if either by its direct and immediate, or any concomitant expences, it leads him into difficulties and distresses, that may lead him into sin; if it consumes a greater part of his income than justice to his creditors, the duty of providing for those who belong to him, or of liberal charity to every proper good purpose allows; or if, without any other harm, it engages his heart, and a fondness for it grows upon him; if it lowers his character, and so lessens his ability of doing good in the world; nay, supposing it doth him no harm at all, yet if it doth harm by his means to others; if it brings the worthless and the wicked into credit and familiarity with their betters; if it intices the well meaning by example, or forces them by false shame, into doing any thing, which either in itself, or in their circumstances, is unlawful or unwise: in every one of these cases it is without question very blamable. And whoever impartially considers how he shall preserve himself clear from guilt, as to all of them, will assuredly find it requisite either to abstain from play intirely, or to restrain it in every respect to much narrower bounds than most men do. For the great have, in this matter, as well as many more, trusted to their riches so indiscreetly, and neglected other considerations so intirely; and their inferiors, down to the lowest of those that can call themselves persons of fashion (and even beneath that rank) have followed them so thoughtlessly and wildly, that play is become one of the principal sins of the present age, is spread to a degree that none of the former ever knew, and daily

brings forth fruits that many succeeding ones may have cause to lament.

But supposing wealth be neither spent in this, nor any of the gross vices mentioned before; yet if it be employed in ministering to a course of more decent and refined luxury, or in supporting such a pomp of life as nourishes vanity and pride, or in filling so much time with unprofitable entertainment, that little room is left in the mind for objects of importance: these things also the rich and great must be also charged to amend. For though their condition will permit plenty and elegance, diversions and amusements, perhaps dignity and grandeur; yet it will not permit their living to these things, their being quite taken up with them, and lost in them. For not only the transition is too easy from several innocent pleasures to forbidden ones, and expensiveness in any way breeds powerful temptations, both to omit right and to do wrong things, but supposing these dangers avoided, yet a life devoted wholly or chiefly to the gratifications of sense, the enjoyment of greatness, or indulgence of trifles, is not the life of a rational agent; less still of a moral and religious one; but least of all of a miserable sinner, who has so very much to account for, and that so very soon. And what our account will end in, if we make it our great business here to delight ourselves, without looking further, St. Paul hath given us a strong intimation, when he saith, *they that live in pleasure are dead whilst they live.** Our Saviour too hath forewarned us at large to the same purpose, in that awful parable of the rich man, who, being neither charged with injustice nor debauchery, but only described as *clothing* himself *in purple and fine linnen,*

* 1 Tim. v. 6.

faring sumptuously every day, and receiving these as his *good things,* on which he placed his heart; did notwithstanding after death *lift up his eyes in torment,* and petitioned in vain for the mitigation of his sentence:* an undeniably just one upon all those who *trust in uncertain riches,* or any thing they can procure with them, instead of *the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy.* But this part of the text must be reserved for the subject of another discourse. I would only observe further at present, that our blessed Lord hath cautioned us no less against *the cares* than the pleasures *of this life;* and that his reason to avoid *overcharging our hearts* with either, is the most forcible that can be; lest *that day come upon you unawares.*† Riches and greatness no one thinks can secure him from death; but they can make many forget it as absolutely as if they did think so; and please themselves with the imagination, that they have *much good laid up for many years,* till, when they apprehend it least, *their soul is required of them.*‡ Therefore we should often call to mind the Psalmist's admonition: *They that trust in their wealth, and boast themselves in the multitude of their riches, none of them can redeem his brother, nor give God a ransom for himself, that he should live for ever, and not see corruption: when he dieth, he shall carry nothing away; his glory shall not descend after him. Man that is in honour, and understandeth not, is like the beasts that perish:*§ like them in this world; but will wish in vain to be like them in the next, when all that have lived unmindful of God, *the kings of the earth,* (as St. John fore-

* Luke xvi. 19—31. † Ibid. xxi. 34. ‡ Ibid. xii. 19, 20.
§ Ps. xlix. 6, 7. 9. 17, 20.

tells) *and the great and the rich and the mighty shall hide themselves in the dens, and in the rocks of the mountains; and shall say to the mountains and the rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the face of the Lamb: for the great day of his wrath is come, and who shall be able to stand?**

* Rev. vi. 15, 16, 17.

SERMON IX.

1 TIM. vi. 17, 18.

CHARGE THEM THAT ARE RICH IN THIS WORLD, THAT THEY BE NOT HIGH-MINDED, NOR TRUST IN UNCERTAIN RICHES, BUT IN THE LIVING GOD, WHO GIVETH US ALL THINGS RICHLY TO ENJOY : THAT THEY DO GOOD, THAT THEY BE RICH IN GOOD WORKS, READY TO DISTRIBUTE, WILLING TO COMMUNICATE.

I HAVE already, in two discourses on these words, explained and enforced the two cautions, which St. Paul requires that the ministers of God's word shall give to persons of wealth and rank, against the sins, to which they are peculiarly liable. And now I proceed to the duties, of which he enjoins they shall be peculiarly reminded.

I. The first is, to *trust in the living God, who giveth us all things richly to enjoy.*

After warning them against placing their happiness in the pre-eminences, the possessions or pleasures of this world, it was very natural to direct them where they should place it: for somewhere we must. And his precept carries the proof of its own fitness along with it. For *the living God* must have the greatest power to reward our trust, and he who *giveth us all things richly to enjoy,* hath shewn himself to have the greatest will also. All that we are, and have, and can hope for, proceeds from him, and depends upon him. Since therefore he hath made us capable of knowing

this; duty, gratitude and interest, conspire to demand, that we devote our whole being to him; use what he hath bestowed on us agreeably to the rules, which he hath prescribed, and for the attainment of the ends, which he had in view; nor ever be so absurdly attentive to his gifts; as to forget the Giver: whose bounty, the more largely we taste of it, ought surely to inspire the warmer love. And therefore the rich and great, on whom Providence hath conferred so many distinguished benefits and privileges, (of the value of which they seem in general highly sensible) are bound beyond others to a most affectionate piety in return: and yet, is it not on the whole visibly true, that these of all others express the least piety in the whole compass of their behaviour.

Too many of them scorn to observe or acknowledge any rule of conduct at all, unless it be fashion, worldly advantage or pleasure. A great part of those who will own, and occasionally seem zealous for the obligations of virtue, or however of some virtues, manifest very little sense, if any, of the duties of religion. Some have never had the condescension, or imagine they never had the leisure, once to think of it: others have heard objections against it, or at least have heard there are such; which, to prove themselves no bigots, they resolve to believe are unanswerable, without further inquiry. And not a few, who are fully persuaded, after a sort, both of the greatness and the goodness of God, still are as absolutely negligent of him, as if no regard whatever were due to him for either. Yet, if we are to reverence authority, and love mercy, and believe in veracity, and be sorry for offences, amongst men; why are not all these things unspeakably more necessary in relation to our Creator? Some persons, it may be, when they are pressed upon the subject,

will plead, that they are by no means without inward regard to God: though they cannot say, they give much outward demonstration of it, in acts of worship. But how real, how deep, how practical, this regard is, they would do well to ask their hearts very carefully: for he that sees their hearts knows with certainty; they that see only their lives, can form a strong presumption: and no one will ever be a gainer, by attempting to deceive either God, or man, or himself.

But supposing them sincere, what reason can there be, why respect to God should not be paid outwardly, when respect to every superior besides is? For surely his knowing we have it, is no sufficient reason for omitting to express it: since visible and stated acts of homage to him appear notwithstanding, both from reason and experience, highly requisite, to preserve and strengthen a sense of religion in our own minds, and to spread it in the world. Or could we have doubted of this otherwise; yet, when he hath expressly required himself to be worshipped, both in public and in private, what pretence have we to a shadow of piety, if we either disobey or think meanly of that command? And they among the great, who neglect to honour God, discern very clearly the necessity, not only of their inferiors paying honour to them, but of their paying honour to persons that are a little above them: and would think the excuses extremely frivolous in their own cases, which they are determined, shall be good and valid in his. What can this inconsistence mean? Surely they do not think it beneath them, to *fall down and kneel before the Lord their Maker*,* while they can bow so very low to a fellow-creature, perhaps a worthless one. And yet really, the manner, in which they sometimes speak of religion, looks a

* Ps. xcv. 6.

good deal this way. I mean, when they own its importance to keep the vulgar in order, and their obligation to attend on its exercises conscientiously, for that purpose; but intimate, that somehow or other they themselves are exempted. Now the difference in the eyes of God, between the highest and lowest of men, is as nothing: and if any part of the world hath need to be restrained by the ties of religious duty; the upper part, being the least subject to other restraints, hath the greatest need: nor can it be more their interest, that the rest of mankind should have a sense of piety kept up amongst them; than it is the interest of the rest of mankind, that the great should. But if this were otherwise, they may depend upon it, that if they will slight religion; such as see them do so, will not be influenced by them to respect it. And therefore all the choice they have is, either to shew some regard to its precepts themselves; or to be content, that their families, their dependants, and the world about them, shall have none. This latter is the resolution, that many seem to have taken: what will follow from it, hath been already felt too much; and if they go on, will be felt continually more. But God grant, they may rather see, before it be too late, both the wickedness and the folly of throwing off that reverence, which is so justly due to him, whose laws are, every one of them, provisions for our temporal happiness in this world, as well as our eternal felicity in the next. Men of rank and fortune, have a much greater concern in the welfare of society, than others; and therefore are more bound in point of prudence to support religion: they have a much greater ability of doing it, and are particularly intrusted with it, and therefore are more bound in point of conscience. But what completes their obligation, in both respects, is, that if they neg-

lect it, the endeavours of others will, humanly speaking, be all in vain. There may be some hope, even for a wicked nation, while the fear of God remains in any considerable number of the wealthy and ruling part of it: but when they once come to be thoroughly corrupted; then every thing is ripe for ruin. And therefore the prophet Jeremiah, after complaining very pathetically, of the sinfulness and impiety of the bulk of his countrymen, still thought there was one resource left. But when he found, that those of high condition were as bad, or worse, than the rest; he immediately gives up all, and pronounces their destruction. *I said,* (speaking of the common people) *These are poor, they are foolish; they know not the way of the Lord, and the judgment of their God. I will get me unto the great men, and will speak unto them: for they have known the way of the Lord, and the judgment of their God. But, these have altogether broken the yoke, and burst the bonds. Wherefore a lion out of the forests shall tear them, and a wolf of the evening shall spoil them; a leopard shall watch over their cities;—because their transgressions are many, and their backslidings are increased.**

But is it possible for us to keep up a sufficient profession of religion, to secure both public order and domestic tranquillity; yet by no means have a sufficient sense of it, for obtaining eternal life: and what will the former avail us without the latter? It is not a merely prudential and political piety; it is not one, that will only form our behaviour into an outward regularity, or affect our hearts transiently now and then, that will stand us in stead hereafter: it must be a fixed inward principle, that moves us effectually to look beyond every thing in this world, to God the fountain of all

* Jer. v. 4—6. † Ps. cxlii. 6.

good: and to take him for *our hope and our portion in the land of the living*.† He offers himself for such, and surely we ought to accept the offer. He is able to make us happy, and nothing else is: whatever earthly good we have most pleasure in, quickly fails: or if it did not, in a few years life itself will fail: *and what is our hope when God taketh away our soul* ?* In that awful hour, if we have not him to trust in, we shall have nothing; and the foundation must be laid now, if we would build upon it then. But honours, riches and pleasures unaccountably turn away mens attention from these obvious truths; and present them with such temptations to trust in themselves and external advantages of their condition, for all the happiness they need; that they cannot be admonished too often, to *trust* only *in the living God;* and that, only in such a manner, as he hath declared they safely may.

Some have a bold and irreverent confidence, that all is well with them in respect to the divine favour, on no other ground than that they are guilty of only such faults as the generality of the world are: as if God would not dare to punish a majority; and men might be as wicked as they would, provided there were but enough of them so. But over and above this, persons of rank seem extremely apt to think, that they shall be treated with peculiar indulgence: whereas indeed, since *much hath been given them, much will be required of them*†; and in comparison, *mercy will soon pardon the meanest, but the mighty shall be mightily tormented*‡. Others acknowledge the necessity of a virtuous life for all men, but indulgently presume their own to have been so, which in strictness hath been far otherwise; and then *trusting in themselves that they are righteous*§, imagine God their debtor.

* Job xxvii. 8. † Luke xii. 48. ‡ Wisd. vi. 6. § Luke xviii. 9.

Or if they do confess they have been faulty; repentance and amendment, (which they apprehend to be sufficiently in their own power at any time) they conceive, immediately blots out all, and gives them a claim of right to pardon and reward. Now on the contrary, reason itself shews, that forgiveness is an act of mere voluntary mercy: and that nothing is due from justice, even to a creature perfectly obedient, but that his being be not made, on the whole, worse than not being. To this, experience adds, that our best obedience is very imperfect: and agreeably to both, the gospel teaches, that by *the deeds of the law shall no flesh be justified; for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God:* that *we are justified freely by his grace, through the redemption that is in Jesus Christ, whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation, through faith in his blood; that he might be just and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus**. It teaches also, that *we are not sufficient of ourselves even to think any thing; but our sufficiency is of God*†. That *by his grace we are what we are;* and when we perform good works, it is *not we, but the grace of God which is with us*‡; and proceeds from his *holy spirit,* whom *he will give to them that ask him*§.

A doctrine, which so entirely *excludes boasting*‖, must be very disagreeable to human pride in general: but especially mortifying to those whom the flattery of the world, and of their own hearts, hath accustomed to consider themselves in a light, extremely different from that of miserable sinners. For this reason amongst others, in the early ages, *not many mighty, not many noble, were called*¶ effectually: and

* Rom. iii. 20, 26. † 2 Cor. iii. 5. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 10. § Luke xi. 13.
‖ Rom. iii. 27. ¶ 1 Cor. i. 26.

down to the present, worldly greatness hath ever been a powerful obstacle to christian humility, in faith as well as practice. What our Saviour said to the Jews: *How can ye believe, which receive honour one of another, and seek not the honour, which cometh from God only**, holds but too true concerning the upper part of those who call themselves his disciples. They therefore should apply with peculiar care, to become such indeed; by looking into their own breasts, and considering well their need of the divine mercy; *casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God; and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ*†. Trusting in ourselves, can afford us only a false peace for a time, which will ruin us at last: *but whoso putteth his trust in the Lord, mercy embraceth him on every side*‡. He hath a covenant right to pardon and comfort, assistance in all good, protection from all evil, and everlasting life to crown the whole.

But then to make his title sure, he must exert his trust in all circumstances, *and walk by faith, not by sight*§. Even good persons are strangely apt to lay much too great a stress on worldly advantages. Hence it is, that they desire them so earnestly, and delight in them so highly; without considering that God, and a good conscience, can make us far happier without them, than others are with them. Were we but convinced of this, we should feel, with what justice the psalmist pours contempt on the vehement pursuers of what this earth hath to give. *There be many that say, who will shew us any good? but, Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us. Thou hast put gladness in my heart more than in the time, that*

* John v. 44. † 2 Cor. x. 5. ‡ Ps. xxxii. 10. § 2 Cor. v. 7.

*their corn and their wine increased. I will lay me down in peace; and take my rest: for it is thou, Lord, only, that makest me dwell in safety**. For want of reflecting on whom we depend, we are apt to be elated *in our prosperity, and say, we shall never be moved;* when indeed it is *the Lord of his goodness that hath made our hill so strong:* and the moment he *turns his face from us, we shall be troubled*†. From the same cause we are apt to be dejected when afflictions befall us, or dangers threaten us; forgetting, that though *great and many are the troubles of the righteous, the Lord delivereth him out of them all*‡ in this world, if it be expedient for him; if not, he shall be supported under them, and they shall increase his reward in the next. But the wicked *God shall destroy for ever, and root them out of the land of the living: the righteous also shall see it and fear, and say,* with awful approbation of the divine justice, *lo, this is the man that took not God for his strength, but trusted unto the multitude of his riches, and strengthened himself in his wickedness*§.

We should all therefore learn to live more to our Maker; to imprint on our hearts, and exert in our whole behaviour, a stronger sense of his present providence, and future rewards. It would be a direction, a security, an improvement, a comfort to us, beyond expression. But especially they, who have the greatest number of interesting and pleasing objects in this world to fix their thoughts upon; they, who may seem to have the least need of looking further, have indeed the greatest, to be frequently charged, as the Jews were by Moses; *beware, lest when thou hast eaten and art full, and hast built*

* Ps. iv. 6, 9. † Ps. xxx. 6, 7. ‡ Ps. xxxiv. 19. § Ps. lii. 6, 7, 8.

*goodly houses and dwelt therein; and when thy silver and thy gold is increased, and all thou hast is multiplied, then thine heart be lifted up, and thou forget the Lord thy God**. Now if those persons forget him, who have the most reason to remember him thankfully, it is double guilt, and indeed proportionable folly. For what can be more obvious, than that considering all our good things, as the marks of his kindness to us, must unspeakably inhance their value; nor can it lay us under any other than beneficial restraints in the use of them: Then besides, how naturally doth this consideration lead us forward to the yet more delightful one, of that sweet security, in which we may live here under the superintendency of so gracious a Being; and of those infinitely better things, which he hath yet in store for us hereafter. *This God is our God for ever and ever. He shall be our guide unto death*†. *Thou shall guide me with thy counsel, and after that receive me with glory. Whom have I in heaven but thee? and there is none upon earth that I desire in comparison of thee. My flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever*‡. There is nothing enthusiastic, nothing extravagant, in such reflections and feelings as these, when they are grounded on good evidence of our title to God's favour; and in that case we cannot act a more pious or more rational part, than to indulge and enjoy them. Only we must not dwell upon contemplation so as to forget action; but, as the psalmist directs, *trust in the Lord, and be doing good*§. Agreeably to which rule,

2. The second duty prescribed in the text, as pecu-

* Deut. viii. 11, 14. † Ps. xlviii. 14. ‡ Ps. lxxiii. 23, 24, 25. § Ps. xxxvii. 3.

liarly necessary for the rich and great, is, *that they do good, that they be rich in good works.* Extensive and important as this duty is, its nature is so well understood, and the motives for practising it so obvious, as to make it unnecessary for me to enlarge particularly upon it. And indeed, if men of rank and fortune observe duly the preceding part of the Apostle's charge, they will easily be induced to observe the concluding one. If they are neither so *high-minded* as to neglect and despise their fellow-creatures; nor so selfish as to *trust in uncertain riches,* in the acquisition, the possession, or voluptuous enjoyment of them, for their happiness, but expect it only from their acceptance with the *living God;* they will naturally imitate him whom they desire to please, particularly in his beneficence, the most amiable of all his perfections. And it is not by their wealth only that they are able, and therefore called to do good, but by their whole behaviour, by the example of their piety and justice, their abstinence from criminal and imprudent pleasures; by an active, yet mild, public spirit, and an honourable disinterestedness in private life, united with a decent frugality; by attention to the interests, present and future, of their families, their friends and dependants; conducted in such a manner, as always to be consistent with a general care, to encourage and recommend worthy persons and actions, and treat the unworthy with the disapprobation and contempt which they deserve. These are methods, by which those of rank and influence may do much greater service to mankind than large liberalities would do; and by a contrary behaviour, in any one of the above-mentioned instances, they may easily be authors of more mischief than their whole estates would compensate for. Now the Apostle hath determined, that *though they bestow*

all their goods to feed the poor, yet if they *have not* the *charity* to act in other respects as they ought, *it will profit them nothing.**

But still, though almsgiving is by no means the whole of beneficence, yet it is an essential part in those whom God hath qualified for it. And he hath *given them all things richly* and in plenty, not merely for themselves *to enjoy*, in the vulgar sense, but that others may enjoy a due share of them, and they the pleasure of imparting it; the worthiest and highest enjoyment of wealth that can be. This therefore is the purpose for which we should remember we are intrusted with it, and be bountiful in proportion to the trust; for to with-hold but part of what is due, knowingly, is the same kind, though not the same degree of unfaithfulness, as to with-hold the whole. Indeed how much exactly is due, God hath no where determined; nor could there, in the midst of so great a variety of circumstances, have been given particular rules, fitted to every case: nor hath any pious mind, that endeavours to judge and act as rightly as it can, the least reason to be anxious for want of a more precise knowledge, where it is not to be had. But, in general, that both our charity and our generosity should bear some decent and liberal proportion to our abilities, and the *rich in this world be rich in good works* also, not only the text enjoins, but common reason dictates; and if we are deficient, the *poor widow*, with her *two mites*,† will far outdo us in that very virtue, by the practice of which our Maker justly expects we should appear distinguished.

Nor is it sufficient for the rich to give plentifully, but they must do it, on every fit occasion, speedily; *be ready to distribute*, and not stay till the circumstances

* 1 Cor. xiii. 3. † Mark xii. 42.

of the poor are beyond recovery, or their spirits broken under the weight of their misfortunes, but make haste to help them, and, as far as possible, prevent distress. *Say not unto thy neighbour, Go and come again, and to-morrow I will give, when thou hast it by thee,** *and delay not to shew him mercy.*† Nor is it enough to be outwardly expeditious, but we must be inwardly *willing to communicate;* not part with our benefactions *grudgingly and of necessity,* as obeying the divine command merely because we dare not disobey it, *for God loveth a cheerful giver.*‡ To the poor indeed it is all one from what principle we give, but to us the difference is infinite. In the heart lies all the value. Ever so little will be accepted of Heaven, if it proceed from a mind that would gladly have done more; and ever so much will be despised, if we secretly wish we could have saved it. St. Paul's exhortation therefore is of unspeakable importance: *He that sheweth mercy, let him do it with cheerfulness.*§ And indeed, what can we have more cause to rejoice in doing? It is very comfortable to think, that we are able; it is delightful to think that by our means the miseries of God's creation are lessened; it is no small satisfaction to be loved and blessed in this world, but it is the greatest possible to *lay up in store for yourselves a good foundation against* the next, *that we may lay hold on eternal life,*‖ and have it said to us by our Judge at the last day, *Well done, good and faithful servant, thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things: enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.*¶

* Prov. iii. 28. † Ecclus xxix. 8. ‡ 2 Cor. ix. 7.
§ Rom. xii. 8. ‖ 1 Tim. vi. 19. ¶ Matth. xxv. 21.

SERMON X.

MATTH. xi. 5.

——AND THE POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM.

THESE words are part of our Saviour's answer to the disciples of John the Baptist, who came to inquire whether Jesus were himself the Messiah, or only a prophet commissioned to foretel his coming. For it appears from the first chapter of St. John's Gospel, that many of the Jews expected, besides Elias, another prophet to precede or accompany their great Deliverer: mistaking perhaps the prophet described, Deut. xviii. for an attendant of the Messiah, instead of the Messiah himself, whom they were apt to consider only in the character of a king. And as Jesus had now manifested himself some time to the world, without taking this character upon him, it was natural enough for John's disciples to imagine, that perhaps he came in the other only. John himself indeed knew, and probably had told them the contrary; but finding them still desirous of further satisfaction, was extremely willing they should have it: and to make the inquiry as easy to them as possible, directs them to propose the question, not in their own name, but in his. On their doing it, Jesus performs in their sight a considerable number of his usual beneficent miracles, joined, as it should seem, with suitable instructions; and then, without declaring himself ex-

pressly, (which he chose, for wise and kind reasons, to avoid before the multitude) dismisses them with an answer, taken, the greatest part of it, out of the words of Isaiah; in which he had foretold, that the Messiah should perform just such miracles, and give just such instructions. For we read, that *in that same hour he cured many of their infirmities and plagues, and unto many that were blind he gave sight.** *Then he answered and said unto them, Go and shew John again those things, which ye do hear and see. The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk: the lepers are cleansed: and the deaf hear; the dead are raised up, and the poor have the Gospel preached to them.*

The prediction, of his applying himself peculiarly to instruct the lower part of the world, it is probable, he purposely reserved to the last place; because his doing it, (besides its being the completion of a prophecy) was, though not a miracle, as the rest were, yet a singular proof, both of the humanity of his temper and doctrine, and of his disinterestedness too. For this method was incapable of doing him service, and in fact did him no small prejudice with those, who had the power of that nation in their hands. The Jewish teachers and rulers, who were the same, kept the common sort at a very great distance; and on that, amongst other accounts, were highly reverenced by them. The familiarities therefore, to which Jesus condescended, immediately set all these against him; and furnished them with an opportunity of representing him and his disciples as equally contemptible. Thus, when their own officers, (whom it seems his discourses had struck as powerfully as they did the

* Luke vii. 21.

rest of the multitude) could not help applauding him before their faces, *Never man spake like this Man;* their answer is, *Have any of the Rulers, or the Pharisees, believed on him? This people, which knoweth not the law, are cursed.** But indeed the humble and unbiassed minds of the illiterate are much better judges of truth, when proposed to them, than such as are blinded with learned prejudice, worldly interest, or sensual pleasures. To the former therefore principally our Saviour vouchsafed his instructions, grieving to see them *scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd;*† and they, receiving his doctrine into *honest and good hearts,*‡ became in great numbers his followers: and at first were almost the only ones he had. For St. Luke tells us, *he lifted up his eyes on his disciples and said, Blessed be ye poor, for yours is the kingdom of God.*§ The Gospel indeed makes all blessed who receive it, both by its useful precepts, and its gracious promises; yet the poor especially, as they have most need of those directions and supports in this life, and assurances of happiness in the next, which it communicates. But then, to receive them, they must be not only poor, but his disciples. It is not being in a low condition, but being virtuous and pious in that condition, that intitles persons to God's favour, as it is not being wealthy and great, but making an ill use of wealth and greatness, that provokes his displeasure. So that the happiest or the wretchedest here, may, according as they behave, be infinitely more happy or wretched hereafter. Our Saviour therefore, we find, in St. Matthew, expresses himself thus: *Blessed are the*

* John vii. 45—49. † Matth. ix. 36. ‡ Luke viii. 15.
§ Luke vi. 20.

*poor in spirit,** they whose dispositions are suited to their mean circumstances, reasonable and resigned, lowly and submissive.

Preaching the Gospel to the poor comprehends therefore, of necessity, instructing them in the duties, as well as the comforts, belonging to their state. And as our Lord and Master did both, so should his ministers. The duties of the rich and great I have lately recounted, and pressed upon them, very freely, from this place. And now, I hope, you, that are the inferior part of the world, will patiently bear, in your turn, the same well-meaning plainness of speech that your betters have borne; and make the proper use of it, as God grant them to do. Under the general term, *poor,* is contained a considerable variety of degrees; each therefore should apply peculiarly to themselves the precepts that peculiarly belong to them, and take no offence at the rest. Of such as are common to all, they may all reap the benefit; and the highest may receive some admonition from what is said to the lowest; as it will contribute to regulate, not only their way of thinking and behaving to their inferiors, but their temper and conduct in other respects. For to be *poor in spirit,* a very different thing from mean-spiritedness, is incumbent on the wealthiest and the noblest.

1. The first duty to be enjoined you, is, contentedness in your poverty. A hard saying, you will be apt to think, when scarce any one is contented in the midst of riches and honours. But the discontent of such, you will own, is without reason. And if it can at all arise from mere humour, without any thing in fact to justify it, possibly yours may be unjustifiable too. In order to try then, whether it be or not,

* Matth. v. 3.

let us consider what ground for complaint you can alledge.

That some should have greater plenty than others, is no more a hardship, than that some should have better health or understandings, or longer lives. If there could be a claim of right to any of these things, all men would have an equal claim; but as they are intirely the free gifts of God, he may certainly give them in what proportion he pleases. He hath made some orders of beings, as we see with our eyes, much lower than the lowest of men; he hath made others, as we are taught in Scriptures, much higher than the highest of men; and doubtless he could have made them unspeakably higher than they are. If then any part of the creation may complain of mere inferiority every part may complain without end. If any part may complain merely because it suffers something, no part, that we are acquainted with, is exempt from all suffering. And amongst other evils, why may not God permit some to feel poverty?

Indeed, without perpetual miracles, how can it be prevented? For supposing equality of circumstances were to be established at this very time, it could never subsist. One person would be industrious and prudent, and mend his affairs; another, negligent or injudicious, and ruin them. Now that each should possess for his own, what his own care and labour hath acquired, is no more than strict justice; that what each dies possessed of, should descend to his own children and relations, preferably to others, is surely but reasonable. And yet from hence will of course follow, by degrees, all the wealth, and all the poverty, that we now see.

The first Christians indeed at Jerusalem had all their possessions in common;* but this neither ap-

* Acts ii. 44, 45. iv. 34, 35.

pears to have been their practice any where else, nor to have lasted there, nor to have been designed to last, nor to have been more than a voluntary agreement. For St. Peter tells Ananias and Sapphira, that they needed not, unless they pleased, either to have sold their land, or put any of the purchase-money into the common stock; but that pretending they had put it in all, (which intitled them to a maintenance) when indeed they had secreted a part, and how large a part we know not, was an impious fraud.* Community of goods therefore was no command then; and very soon after we find, in the New Testament, the distinction of rich and poor established and allowed every where amongst believers. Nor can the destroying of it be attempted, without the most dreadful injustice, confusions and mischiefs in human society; nor could the attempt succeed. And even supposing every one were to agree in the scheme, who can say what would follow upon it? in all likelihood so universal a neglect of industry, that but few of the present conveniencies of life would be provided; and perhaps mankind in general would be more destitute than most of the poor are now.

If then there must be high and low in the world, why is it harder that you should be of the latter sort than that others should? Were they in your place, ought not they to be content? And if so, why ought not you now? It may be, notwithstanding the different appearances you make, the difference of your happiness is very small, or possibly you have the most. The pleasures, for which you envy the great, are usually very tasteless to them; and would be so to you very soon, if you were in their place. Then, amidst all that they seem to enjoy, you little know what many of

* Acts v. 1—4.

them suffer, and how much of it they suffer from being in the station they are. You will say indeed, that the inconveniencies you feel you cannot avoid; whereas, if they feel any, it is their own fault. But, in truth, there are disquiets, belonging to their rank, from which yours is exempt. Or allowing it to be their own fault, what follows? Why, that your sufferings proceeding from God's providence, if you behave well under them, you will be rewarded for them; and theirs, proceeding from their own wrong conduct, without repentance they will be punished for them over and above. And who can tell, but were you in the same situation, you might fall into the same faults? Power and rank and leisure and plenty may indeed be used to excellent purposes; but prove commonly, in fact, such strong temptations to the worst of sins, that a station less exposed to danger, and which obliges you in several respects to behave only as all persons ought to behave, may be the greatest worldly blessing you could have had; even though it were accompanied with much more grievous outward disadvantages than it is. But indeed some of those disadvantages consist in mere opinion and fancy. You are miserable, because you think yourself poor; at the same time there are those, who, if they were but in your condition, would be happy, for they would think themselves rich. And the very persons whom you envy, because they are above you, it may be are pitying themselves all the while, because others are above them. This, you see, is only fancy and folly on both sides.

But as to more real inconveniencies. Just in the same manner, that custom makes a life of pleasure insipid to the great; it makes a life of labour and hardship tolerable, and comfortable to their inferiors; unless they set their own minds to make it otherwise.

Indeed when persons are reduced, from ease and affluence, to take pains and feel straits; this is a burden much heavier. But even then, reason and time, and especially religion, will teach you to support it very well. If it proceed from your own fault; you have little cause to repine, and an useful admonition to learn more wisdom. If from God's disposal of things, his justice and goodness will, sooner or later, amply recompense you for it; and all his servants will have compassion on you, and help you, in the mean while. The exhortation therefore is very reasonable: *Fear not, my son, that we are made poor; for thou hast much wealth, if thou fear God, and depart from all sin, and do that which is pleasing in his sight.** *Whatever is brought upon thee take cheerfully; and be patient, when thou art changed to a low estate.*† But such as are born to that estate, may, for the most part, be very happy in it, if they will. And so many of them are visibly full as happy as the rest of the world; that the defect must lie in their temper, not their circumstances, if others are unhappy. When indeed any uncommon difficulties befall them; when they have numerous families, and perhaps little employment; or when old age disables them from working; or sickness calls for relief, which they have not the means of procuring; then their case is very grievous; and all, who know it, should be tenderly affected, and assist them plentifully. But even at such times of distress, they should recollect, that their superiors are by no means intirely free from the same uneasinesses. Persons of considerable rank often find it hard enough to bring up and provide for a number of children decently; and when infirmities and diseases attack the wealthiest, though they may have better advice and

* Tob. iv. 21. † Ecclus ii. 4.

accommodations than others, yet these things are not able to lighten the burthen near so much, as they that want them imagine. And whoever hath health; which the common people that live regularly, have the most of; and a good conscience, which all may have that will; seldom needs to be miserable on account of his circumstances. *Health*, saith the wise Son of Sirach, is *above all gold: and a strong body above infinite wealth. There is no riches above a sound body: and no joy above the joy of the heart.**

These comforts therefore you should value as they deserve: you should reflect also, that of every natural gratification, which God hath provided for man, (and all the artificial ones are trifling in comparison) he hath provided you a good share. You can behold the light of the sun, breathe the freshness of the air, enjoy the beauties of the seasons, relish your food, and be refreshed by your sleep, as well as the greatest monarchs on earth. The higher and social pleasures too of kind affections, real friendships, frank and cheerful conversations, are as much within your reach, as they can be within any one's, if not more. And if your rank be not an honourable, it is however a necessary one; and proper care, to do the business of it skilfully and diligently, will and must, and you cannot but be sensible does, make you regarded, and sought after by your betters. On the whole, therefore, even the poor have sufficient cause, not only to be content, but thankful to Heaven, for its goodness to them.

Still the straits and hardships of some of them, though God's help makes the worst supportable, may leave them small reason to be fond of life. But so may the pains and sorrows of the wealthiest. And

* Ecclus xxx. 15, 16.

even this situation affords you one advantage, that you will have less inducement to regret the approach of death; may detach your affections without reluctance from a world, the enjoyments of which are sadly embittered to others by the thoughts of leaving it; and comfort yourselves with the prospect of going to that place, *where the weary be at rest, and the servant is free from his master.** *O death, how bitter is the remembrance of thee to a man that liveth at rest in his possessions, that hath prosperity in all things! But acceptable is thy sentence to the needy, and to him that is vexed with all things.*† Yet were deliverance from present evils by future endless insensibility the thing hoped for, this would be a melancholy relief. But religion sets before us, an infinitely brighter view of things: assuring us, that *God hath chosen the poor of this world, rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom, which he hath promised to them that love him.*‡ Here then is the strong consolation, that on however bad a footing any may be, in their temporal concerns, we are all on a level, as to our eternal interests: or if there be any difference, 'tis in favour of the suffering part of mankind. *Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.*§

But, admitting that there is by no means any ground to complain of God, the poor will alledge however, that they have reason frequently to complain of their fellow-creatures, the rich and great, for shewing so little regard to them in their necessities. And far from denying this, it is our duty, who are ministers of the Gospel, to plead it for them, and excite others to abound more and more in tender compassion and liberality towards them.

* Job iii. 17, 19. † Ecclus xli. 1, 2. ‡ James ii. 5.
§ Matth. v. 4.

But then, whilst we endeavour, on all occasions, that due care may be taken of you who are poor; we must remind you, not to be insensible of what is done, nor to require more than is reasonable. And here, in the first place, all the common people of this nation ought to esteem it an unspeakable blessing, that they live in a land of laws and liberty; where the meanest is protected from the oppression of the greatest, to a degree, that would be incredible in most countries. For too many countries there are, in which your small properties, your whole disposal of yourselves, and your very lives would be subject to the will of arbitrary masters: and you would neither dare to speak a free word, nor even to worship your Maker in the way that your consciences direct you. Surely then your condition requires of you, great thankfulness, not only to God, but to your earthly superiors, who allow and preserve to you such valuable privileges; and great respect, in your manner, both of behaving towards them, and thinking of them; which is very ill shewn by murmuring against them for things, that you cannot be judges of, and in all likelihood are utterly misinformed about.

But farther: the lowest part of the poor, in particular, should consider, what ample provision for their wants is made here by law; such as no other nation upon earth hath established: what noble foundations, for their relief under sickness or accidents, and for the education of their children, private charity hath laid: and these things should dispose them to a better opinion, both of the comforts of their own condition, and of the goodness of those, to whom they are owing. If still you are any of you in distress, recollect, whether your own mismanagement hath not been the principal occasion of it; and lay the blame, which you

ought, upon yourselves, before you lay any upon others, however, even in this case you are to be relieved; but not so liberally, as if you had deserved better. Consider too, whether even now you are not able to get or to save more than you do; and remember that no one is bound to give you, what your own diligence and frugality would supply you with, if you pleased. But supposing your want and your merit, as great as possible; it is not every one, to whom you apply, that can do for you what you imagine. Undoubtedly the rich are often hard-hearted; but perhaps the poor, are full as often, immoderate in their expectations and unjust in their censures. You do not know, what sums people are able to give in charity; for in all likelihood, you are neither well acquainted with their incomes, nor the various demands that there are upon them, of other sorts: which last may easily be greater, than you can well apprehend. Besides, you do not know, what they do give in charity. That which they refuse to you, or your acquaintance, they may bestow, and perhaps much more, on others, who possibly are full as proper objects, whatever you may think. And I doubt not, but many a good man is frequently cursed, for denying a trifle to a clamorous public petitioner; who hath been largely and willingly bountiful to private distresses, perhaps but the hour before; and it may be, doth more service by his prudent choice, than his liberal distribution. We ought not indeed to pass over any of the poor, from partiality or penuriousness; but *give to every one that asketh,** so far as our circumstances permit us, and the end of giving, will be served by it. But as giving to some would do harm, and we cannot give to all enough to do them good, charity itself forbids us to interpret this precept

* Luke vi. 30.

in the fulness of its literal extent. Yet, God forbid, that any should seek a pretext for relieving few or none, because many are undeserving, and they cannot relieve every one. Such a plea will not excuse them in the opinion of men here; much less in that awful judgment hereafter, when the *rich and the poor* shall *meet together* before the *Lord, the Maker of them all.** But as the wealthy should not contrive to evade almsgiving, so the needy should not be forward to suspect them of it; but resolve to *judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who will make manifest the counsels of the heart.*†

One thing more, to be observed by you in favour of your condition, is, that God hath not left you to depend solely on the piety and charity of the rich; but provided, that their love of gain, their vanity, or their luxury, shall be made what they do not design them for, the means of doing some good to their inferiors, by employing them; as well as much harm, by setting them an ill example. More good might be done indeed, and all the harm avoided, would they act from the principles they ought. For the follies and vices of one part of mankind, are far from being the proper method of maintaining the other. But however, it is a remarkable instance of the kindness of providence, to have ordered things so, that they who mean you little or no service, shall do you a great deal: and contribute, without thinking of it, to make your condition comfortable, while perhaps they are making themselves wretched, both in this life and that which is to come.

Upon the whole then it appears, that you have no ground of complaint against God; and much less, perhaps than you imagined, against men; that your

* Prov. xxii. 2. † 1 Cor. iv. 5.

state hath many comforts belonging to it; and usually not many necessary sufferings, beyond what others feel. But when any of you have the most, only do your duty faithfully and prudently, and you may compose your minds with a full assurance, that at length all shall end well: *Your light afflictions, which are but for a moment, shall work for you an eternal weight of glory,** in the next world: and in this, as God hath enabled you to bear them hitherto, he will doubtless enable you to bear them still; nay, perhaps lighten your burthen when you least think of it. *For the poor shall not alway be forgotten: the patient abiding of the meek shall not perish for ever.*† *The eye of the Lord is upon them that fear him, on them that put their trust in his mercy; to deliver their soul from death, and keep them alive in the time of famine.*‡ *Trust in the Lord, and do good: so shalt thou dwell in the land, and verily thou shalt be fed.*§ Some means or other Heaven will point out to you, to prevent your falling into the utmost extremities. Providence is your security: the greatest persons on earth have no better. Without a title to God's favour, no one can be happy: and with it no one needs be miserable. For *whether a man be rich or poor; if he have a good heart towards the Lord, he shall at all times rejoice with a cheerful countenance.*‖

* 2 Cor. iv. 17. † Ps. ix. 18. ‡ Ibid. xxxiii. 18, 19.
§ Ibid. xxxvii. 3. ‖ Ecclus xxvi. 4.

SERMON XI.

MATTH. xi. 5.

——AND THE POOR HAVE THE GOSPEL PREACHED TO THEM.

ONE principal mark of true religion is its tendency to make men first good, then happy. Precepts of piety and virtue unattended with rewards, will always be ineffectual: and promises of rewards, independent upon piety and virtue, must of necessity be false. Christianity therefore comprehends both, and proposes them equally to all mankind: requiring obedience from the greatest, as a condition of God's favour; and offering eternal felicity to the meanest, on performance of their duties. For this reason I have lately set before you the peculiar duties of the upper part of the world, and have since proceeded to those of the lower. The only one of the latter, which I have hitherto mentioned, is, that they be content with their condition; and neither murmur at all against God, who never gives them cause; nor complain of men more than they have cause; nor be dejected in their own minds; but compose and support themselves by attending to the comforts of the state they are in, as well as the inconveniences of it. With this I chose to begin, and to insist on it largely, because, when once the poor are convinced, that they may be happy, they

will naturally and cheerfully endeavour to become so: for which end they must learn,

2. To be humble: a virtue closely connected with the former. For as pride is usually the origin of discontent; so discontent in return nourishes pride; till after thinking falsely their present situation too bad for them, men come by degrees to think hardly any sufficiently good. Now all may find great reason for humility, on viewing the imperfections and frailties of human nature in general, and their own in particular: but the poor have additional subjects of mortification to reflect on; they see and feel themselves inferior to most around them, dependant probably on some for their livelihood; and are excluded from the possibility of many improvements and advantages, which others enjoy, still this is no ground for dissatisfaction. For that some are in a better condition, cannot really change theirs into a worse. It remains, notwithstanding, just what it would be, if none were better. And making comparisons only to disquiet yourselves, is great folly. But making them, to learn from that inferiority in which you are placed, a suitable way of thinking, and behaving, is so needful and so obvious a lesson both of wisdom and duty, that neglecting it is inexcusable.

Those minds must be grievously hardened in the wrong, that can have no impression made on them by such peculiarly strong calls to be modest and submissive. Nor will this prove a less unhappy disposition, than it is a faulty one: but, in all likelihood, you will suffer more from the absurd haughtiness of your temper, than all the hardships of your outward circumstances put together. Instead of esteeming or pitying you, the world will dislike and scorn you. For the son of Sirach expresses only what every one

in some measure feels, when having said, *three sorts of men my soul hateth, and I am greatly offended at their life;* he puts down in the first place, *a poor man that is proud**. Pride in those, who should be the farthest from it, is extremely disgustful, even when it is harmless: but usually it leads on to insolent behaviour. Now insolence to superiors may produce unspeakable mischiefs to you; but will always produce some; and though it be confined to your equals or inferiors, will be the source of perpetual uneasiness as well as guilt. Yet I am afraid it is exceeding common for the lower ranks to use those, who are but a little beneath them, with such contempt and harshness as they seldom or never experience from the highest above them; and would not think it tolerable, if they did. But surely then you should be willing to give the treatment, you expect to receive: and seeing, as you must, how well condescension becomes your betters; think how ill, assuming and overbearing becomes you. But supposing your haughtiness injurious or displeasing to no one else, it will be greatly detrimental to yourself. You have formerly been in good circumstances perhaps, or you are descended from a good family; and therefore you will not bring down your heart to your present condition. But what follows from this? Only that struggling under the yoke makes it gall you the more; and you are ten times uneasier than you need to be: whereas would you but accommodate your spirit to your station; you would soon be sensible, that with men as well as God, *he that humbleth himself shall be exalted*†: you would enjoy, in this world, a peaceful composure of soul; and in the next, that blessedness, which is reserved for the meek and lowly.

* Ecclus xxv. 2. † Matth. xxii. 12.

But of all sorts of pride in the poor, the strangest and most pernicious is that, which tempts not a few of them to imagine, they are of too much consequence to do any thing for their own maintenance. Indeed when they have formerly been of good rank and lived in plenty, especially when their fall from it is not owing to wilful sins or follies, it should be the endeavour of their relations and friends to provide for them in some degree, suitably to what they once were. But if such as are especially concerned, either cannot or will not do this, there is little room to expect, that others should contribute enough towards it to be effectual. And therefore the unhappy persons whose case it is, unless Providence raise them up some unlooked-for support, sink down of course to the level of the common poor: and it cannot be more the duty of the charitable to help them, than it is theirs to help themselves by any sort of honest employment, for which they are qualified. Once heaven had placed you in a higher sphere: now it hath reduced you to a lower: the occupations of the latter are as much incumbent upon you at present, as those of the former were before: and your attention to them will be as amply rewarded by the Disposer of all things. You must support yourself, either by virtuous diligence or by vicious courses. The latter nothing can justify: the former, in whatever way you are called to exercise it, will be no reproach, but an honour to you. And the rich and great, far from rejecting and disowning their poor kindred or acquaintance, for condescending to any useful business, when necessity requires, ought to encourage and applaud them. For it is an excellent mark of a right and good mind, that they rather chuse to *work with quietness, and eat their own bread**,

* 2 Thess. iii. 12.

than importune others, or lead themselves into temptation. And indeed the temptations arising from poverty and distress, are so very dangerous to those who have lived in affluence and credit; that as soon as ever they find difficulties coming upon them, (if they have any regard to a good conscience) they must immediately reduce their own expences, lower the appearance and expectations of those who depend on them, and so conduct every thing, as may least expose them to the hazard of acting amiss, and best secure them an honest subsistence. For, whatever a false honour may suggest to the contrary, *better is he that laboureth, and aboundeth in all things, than he that boasteth himself and wanteth bread**. The mention of this matter hath led me insensibly to a

3d duty of the poor, and a very important one, that of Industry; to which humility will greatly incline them, nor will contentment be at all inconsistent with it. For a principal reason why the poor may be justly contented, is, that by diligence they may go on very comfortably; and their being well enough satisfied with their present situation is no manner of objection against endeavouring to better it, when opportunity offers. Every one indeed is bound to be industrious, in a way suitable to his rank, and contribute his proportion to the common good, in which he shares. Those of high degree are able to do much good singly; the poor have each of them very little separate power: but, considered as a collective body, it is on their application and labour that the wealth and strength of nations, all the conveniencies and elegancies of life, indeed the peace and good order of societies depend; for nothing but right employment will keep them out of wrong. These

* Ecclus x. 27.

considerations make their diligence of infinite importance to the public; and there are others, besides their interest in the public, that make it of equal importance to themselves. It is true, in point of conscience, the rich are no less obliged to it than you; but in point of worldly necessity, the difference is very wide. Nor yet is it any disadvantage to you on the whole, that in this particular you cannot well avoid acting as you ought. For to how many of your superiors is it the greatest unhappiness, that their circumstances enable them to lead the lives they do!

But, in your situation, indulging idleness and its companions can last but a very short time; and then will bring after it such dreadful consequences, of distress and reproach, and temptation to every thing bad, (extending not only to you, but to all who belong to you) that you must resolve to follow some honest employment closely. Be it ever so much against your liking at first, you will certainly come in time to be very well pleased with it. Every one, that hath persevered, hath found it so. And then, you will spend the rest of your days in satisfaction and comfort: you will be at peace within, and respected both by your equals and your betters: if you have children, you will look upon them with delight, and they upon you with gratitude; you will make a provision against sickness and accidents; and when you come to old age, you will be able to afford yourself the rest and quiet you want, because you were willing to take pains before: whereas they, who make ease and pleasure the business of their early years, will find shame and sorrow the portion of the remainder. They wickedly neglect the appointed way of supporting themselves; and such as do, will commonly have bitter experience of what it is to crave support

from the bounty of others. *The life of him, that dependeth on another man's table,* saith the son of Sirach, *is not to be counted for a life—Begging is sweet in the mouth of the shameful, but in his belly there shall burn a fire**. Sayings of this nature are not in the least designed against persons, whom Providence hath rendered incapable of supplying their own necessities. They have nothing to be ashamed of, but ought to be assisted with tenderness and respect. God hath sent them to us to receive at our hands what is their due; and whoso *mocketh* such *poor,* Solomon hath declared, *reproacheth their Maker*†. But those who would not be industrious when they could, deserve but little relief afterwards, unless deep repentance intitle them to a better share; and they that will not now when they can, deserve none at all. It was St. Paul's repeated command to the Thessalonians, *that if any one would not work, neither should he eat*‡. And we should all observe this command, both in the disposal of our own charity, and of any other with which we are intrusted, either by private benefactors or by the laws of the land. Overseers of the poor are intrusted by the latter; intrusted to act with humanity and compassion indeed, but with prudence and frugality at the same time. All therefore who in their turns come to serve that office, I hope consider very seriously that the poor, who are fit for employment, ought, as far as possible, to find it for themselves, or have it found for them; and that when either of these things can at all be done, maintaining them in idleness is only teaching them to be useless and wicked. Indeed the poor themselves should consider, that contriving to live upon alms, when they are able, wholly or in part,

* Ecclus xl. 29, 30. † Prov. xvii. 5. ‡ 2 Thess. iii. 10.

to live upon the produce of their own labour, is injuring the community, by doing nothing to promote its welfare; injuring all who contribute to their support, by laying a needless burthen upon them; injuring the rest of the poor, by keeping from them what else they would receive in greater plenty. For no one can bestow so much on proper objects, who is misled to bestow on improper ones too. And the frequency of such impositions makes many unwilling to give what else they would; and furnishes others with a specious pretence for withholding what else, with any decency, they could not. Therefore industry, besides its being an indispensable duty of the poor, in itself, is necessary to their practising a further duty, to which I proceed in the

4th place; that is Honesty. For to beg, instead of working, is one sort of dishonesty. To undertake any work for another, and not do it diligently, is a second sort; often a very provoking, sometimes a very mischievous one. Yet there is a third still grosser, to which idleness tempts them but too powerfully, mentioned in Agur's wise prayer, *lest I be poor and steal.** Now stealth, open or secret, how commonly soever it be committed, is much too plainly a sin to be in general defended; and therefore I need not prove to you the unlawfulness of it. But there are two cases notwithstanding, in which some of the poor seem to think it scarce any fault at all: when either a very small matter is taken away, or it is from a very rich person, which makes it small to him. But every one hath the same right to the least part of his property that he hath to the greatest. And let any one be ever so wealthy, his wealth is his own; and though unquestionably he ought to give of it to the poor, yet they have no manner of authority to take it without his con-

* Prov. xxx. 9.

sent. If they had, it is easy to see into what universal confusion the exercise of that authority would bring the world. But farther: small misdemeanors of this kind occasion great disquiet; men apprehend themselves unsafe in all about them; know not whom to trust; and the innocent are often suspected and sufferers, for what the guilty thus do. Besides, almost all offenders begin with little faults; and from these they venture gradually on, to worse and worse, till they come to make no scruple of the most capital crimes, and perhaps fall under the sentence due to them. Always remember therefore to beware of small sins; and carefully observe one rule more, that when any thing is committed to your trust, being dishonest in that, and disposing of any part of it in a manner, which you know you ought not, and are not allowed, is one of the basest kinds of stealing. Wastefulness also, and even mere negligence, approach to the same sin; for by both you injuriously diminish what is not your own. But the most active cause of dishonesty in the poor is, that finding a great deal of time and pains requisite to get but a small matter, they are strongly tempted to shorten their trouble by unfair methods. And possibly you may thus gain some advantages for a while; but very possibly also you may fail, and be discovered and punished even for your first attempt; or if not, every new attempt will expose you anew to the same danger; and it is not one in great numbers that escapes long. Besides, the continual consciousness of your guilt, and fear of being found out, and hated and scorned ever after, will be a continual torment to you; nay if you are only suspected, and cannot fully confute the suspicion, which a guilty person can never do, this alone, in all probability, may be enough to ruin you. For the livelihood of the poor depends almost intirely on their character, and their

character chiefly consists in their honesty. That will make amends for considerable defects in other points, but nothing will make amends for want of that. Or could you escape every evil that you justly fear through this whole life, yet remember another is to follow it very soon, in which you must account for all your deeds. And he who hath commanded, that *no man defraud or go beyond his brother in any matter,* hath declared at the same time, that *the Lord is the avenger of all such.**

A further virtue, which the poor are greatly concerned to practise, much more carefully than many of them do, is that of speaking truth. But this is so near akin to behaving honestly, the reasons for both are so much the same, and they that do nothing amiss have so little temptation to say any thing false, that I shall pass it over at present. The

5th duty therefore of the poor, which I shall insist on, is that of Frugality; without which your honesty will never be secure, and the fruits of your industry will be very foolishly thrown away. Indeed to deny yourselves what you can well afford, and really want, would be cruel and unnatural; suffering the worst inconveniences of poverty without need. But to make your strait circumstances yet straiter, for the sake of idle gratifications, and distress yourselves in necessaries, only to indulge in trifles and vanities, delicate food, shewish dress, ensnaring diversions, is every way wrong. You will be hankering after more and more pleasures and amusements, till they quite beggar you; your superiors all the while, whom you affect to imitate, will despise you; your equals will hate and censure you; and your children, for whom at this rate you will provide nothing but a bad example, will have

* 1 Thess. iv. 6.

cause, I had almost said, to curse you: whereas, by avoiding unnecessary expences, you will preserve the fruits of your labour intire; be able to make good use of advantages; to stand your ground under losses and disappointments, for they must be expected; to lay up for yourselves, if you prove to have occasion; if not, for those that come after you; nay, to give alms out of your little, and exchange it for treasures in Heaven. Saving is very different from being covetous; it is the surest foundation for being bountiful. And even the poor should extend bounty to any that are still poorer, whenever they can really spare it. Nature and reason call upon them to do so; agreeably to which the Apostle requires men *to work with their own hands, that they may have to give to him that needeth.** And as our Saviour hath taught us,† that our charity shall be estimated in proportion to our abilities, the lowest have as much encouragement as the highest to do, even in this way, all the good they can. A

6th virtue, closely connected with frugality, is Sobriety. One should think, that they who find themselves perpetually in straits could have little temptation to be guilty of excesses. But uneasiness at their condition drives some, a false notion of recruiting their spirits invites others, and unmeaning custom seduces yet more, into that destructive vice of drinking; which, after soothing you perhaps with a short-lived gaiety and forgetfulness of sorrow, will greatly augment the dejection of your minds, as well as the difficulties of your affairs; and thus force you almost to a repetition of the same remedy, which will be followed of course by an increase of the same evils, till your fortunes and healths are both completely ruined. Your morals too,

* Eph. iv. 28. † Mark xii. 42.

for the most part, by indulgence in this one respect, will be gradually corrupted in every other, even if you do escape those desperate sallies of wickedness which prove more speedily fatal. Your families at the same time, if you have any, will be abandoned to wretchedness; your children perhaps murdered in their infancy, by giving them the same liquors with which you are more leisurely destroying yourselves; or if they do survive, are pretty sure to inherit, from such parents, nothing but bad habits of body and mind. If therefore you have any sense, either of prudence or humanity, you will surely avoid this treacherous sin; which pernicious arts, and mistaken policy, have placed but too much within the reach of the lowest of the poor: or if you have fallen into it, you will renounce it instantly, and resolutely bear the uneasiness which abstaining from it may give you for a while, (for you will certainly overcome it by persevcrance) rather than plunge forwards to your utter undoing here and hereafter. A

7th duty of the poor, which must be mentioned, is that of Chastity; a duty, indeed, of all persons, but so far peculiarly incumbent on them, as the transgression of it brings them to more immediate ruin. In one sex it is followed by total loss of honest employment and reputation; by contempt and scorn, even from the men that have seduced them; by grievous temptations to destroy the fruits of their criminal pleasures, and to become abandoned to common prostitution, and with it to every sin, the consequence of which will be every misery of human life. In the other sex it is almost always accompanied with breach of solemn promises; with shocking hardness of heart, where the utmost affection hath been professed; with heavy expences, that often lead to the grossest dishonesty. And

both sexes, in common, it exposes to loathsome and fatal diseases, and to a dreadful sentence of future condemnation: for *they, which do such things,* the Scripture hath declared *shall not inherit the kingdom of God.** Beware then of a sin so peculiarly dangerous; and for that purpose beware of every indiscretion that may entice you to it. I now proceed, in the

8th place, to another duty of the poor, which one should think might sufficiently recommend itself, Good Temper amongst each other. This is necessary in every rank, in order to have any real enjoyment of life; but the more necessary in yours, as you have the fewer enjoyments of other sorts. If you receive harsh treatment from those above you, that perhaps you cannot help; but there is no manner of need of your giving it amongst yourselves. You have felt probably what bitter things injurious language and insolent behaviour are; why then will you make use of them? You know by experience the need of tenderness and pity, why will you not shew it to those who have equal need? You and they are fellow-sufferers in the world; surely that should unite you in mutual kindness, not provoke you to increase your evils, by being hard upon one another. And yet, I fear, some of the greatest hardships, both in word and deed, which the lower part of mankind undergo, proceed from persons who are of low rank themselves. And how far they are capable of carrying such outrages, and how sad the effects of them are, Solomon hath expressed by a very strong comparison: *A poor man that oppresseth the poor, is like a sweeping rain, which leaveth no food.*† I have only a

9th and last duty to recommend, but one peculiarly

* Gal. v. 21. † Prov. xxviii. 3.

implied in preaching the Gospel to you, a serious and deep reverence for religion. Religion is intended, not only for the direction, but the comfort of all degrees of men; and all have need enough of it, but you the most by far. Others have honours, or pleasures, or wealth, elegant amusements or curious inquiries to engage their thoughts; and find some kind of satisfaction in these things, such as it is, and so long as it lasts. But you have nothing, that even seems considerable, to sweeten this world to you, but the expectation of a better. And well may it be for you, that you are reduced to that, as your only choice, which beyond comparison would be your best, if you had ever such plenty. Seek your consolation therefore in what is abundantly capable of giving it you; make the precepts of the Gospel your business, and its promises your joy. Christianity is peculiarly formed for your benefit. Its laws are your charter, by which you claim a right to pity and love from your superiors, as members of the same body; and we, its ministers, are your advocates to plead your cause with them; authorized to offer them eternal happiness, for being kind to you; to denounce condemnation against them, if they use you, in any one respect, cruelly; and to assure you, at the same time, that the worst treatment they can give you shall turn to your good. Think then how justly St. James hath declared *the poor in this world rich in faith;** and let the rich and great, if they will, be profane and vicious, and take the consequences: but *let no man beguile you of your rewards,*† either by corrupting your principles, or misleading your practice. Religion hath graciously provided for you the repose and comfort of this sacred day, which else you had never known. Make it not a

* James ii. 5. † Coll. ii. 18.

time of acting contrary to religion, but statedly use the opportunities it gives you, of learning and being reminded of your several duties, which you must be sensible you need; of having the honour to join on equal terms with the highest of your fellow-creatures, in presenting petitions and praises to God in his house, and feeding at his holy Table. The remainder of your Sabbath employ, partly in *considering your ways*,* and improving your hearts in reading, meditation, and prayer in private: partly by a cheerful, but harmless and prudent, social enjoyment of the leisure which heaven hath allowed you. When the days of labour return, recommend yourselves every morning to the blessing of the Almighty, return him thanks every night for his protection, and offer up to him, in your hearts, the work of each day, as done in obedience to his will, and in hopes of his reward: for these things you will find a support and refreshment beyond all belief. In your whole communication learn both to avoid and abhor that monstrous custom of oaths and curses, which are intermixed continually in the common discourse of too many of the poor; with great irreverence towards God, who hath expressly forbidden them; to the great horror and grief of all good persons; with great danger of running into frequent perjuries, and all manner of profaneness; and without any pretence of profit or pleasure, to make the least amends for so much sin. I cannot, and need not, go through the other obligations of religion at present. Your attendance here, your Bibles and other good books at home, will sufficiently inform you of the nature and importance of them; and I beg you not to imagine, that because you are each of you singly of little consequence in the world, God

* Hag. i. 5. 7.

will take little notice of your conduct; but think and act like the Psalmist, *I am small, and of no reputation, yet do I not forget thy Commandments.** There is nothing beneath God's attention, any more than above it. The meanest things on earth were made and are continually preserved and inspected by him. But indeed the most considerable thing on earth is the behaviour of his rational creatures; and whether that be right or wrong is of infinite moment in his sight; but whether they be high or low, of none at all. He *regardeth not the rich more than the poor, for they are all the work of his hands,*† and shall all account to him for their deeds. Our blessed Redeemer preached the Gospel to the poor, at least as much as to the rich; he laid down his life equally for both; the Holy Spirit offers equally to both the sanctifying influences of his grace; the souls of both are equally capable of, and will equally be consigned to, everlasting happiness or misery. *I saw,* saith St. John, *a throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heavens fled away, and there was found no place for them. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God: and the books were opened, and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.*‡

This awful scene first imprint strongly on your own minds; then on all you can, especially on those who belong to you. You have little else to give them, but if you give them effectually a practical sense of their duty to God and man, it is an inheritance beyond all treasures. You must see how wicked, and how miserable by their wickedness, multitudes of your own rank are: suffer it not to be the case of those who are

* Ps. cxix. 141. † Job xxxiv. 19. ‡ Rev. xx. 11, 12.

dearest to you; but use the little spare time you have (for you will always have some), and the little ability you possess (for God will assist you), to instil into their hearts such early principles of piety and virtue, as may afford you just hopes of their being good and happy by your means in this world, and then following you, to increase your blessedness in the next.

SERMON XII.

ISAIAH xxxviii. 1, 2.

IN THOSE DAYS WAS HEZEKIAH SICK UNTO DEATH; AND ISAIAH THE PROPHET, THE SON OF AMOZ, CAME UNTO HIM, AND SAID UNTO HIM, THUS SAITH THE LORD, SET THINE HOUSE IN ORDER: FOR THOU SHALT DIE, AND NOT LIVE. THEN HEZEKIAH TURNED HIS FACE TOWARD THE WALL, AND PRAYED UNTO THE LORD.

THESE words present to our view a person of the highest rank, in the prime of life, and the full tide of prosperity, seized with a mortal disease: a case, which ought strongly to remind the securest of us all, how uncertain our condition is here on earth. By the goodness of God, a prophet was sent to him, to admonish him of the preparation, that his state required: and the same goodness hath provided, that you shall all be frequently admonished of the same thing, by the ministers of his word. The admonition given him, was the means of prolonging his days in peace and comfort: and those given you, if received in a right manner, may, both naturally and providentially, contribute to procure you longer and happier lives in this world; and will certainly lead you to a life of eternal happiness in the next.

The denunciation made to Hezekiah, however awful, is, by virtue of the original sentence of God, equally true of every man, *Thou shalt die, and not live.*

The healthiest of us is sick of an incurable distemper: whether it shall last a few years, or a few days only, before it carries us off, is all the doubt: and the difference is much less, than we are apt to think it. Would we but consider, how quick the time is gone, which we have lived over, and are dead to, already; to how small a matter the remainder, which will flee away just as fast, can at most amount; and how much short of that we may fall, and in all likelihood shall, since most men do; we should have little need of monitors concerning mortality. Youth is but the morning, and man full of strength, but the noon of a short day: throughout the whole of which, every refreshment of nature intimates to us its continual decays; every loss of a friend or acquaintance tells us, how frail we are ourselves; every sickness calls upon us, with a louder voice, to think of our dissolution; and those disorders, which may seem to whisper it more gently, often bring it on with surprising suddenness. But at least old age gives us, usually the feeling, always the plain sight, of its more immediate and unavoidable approach.

Such constant warning of this important and irrevocable change was doubtless intended to produce a constant regard to it: and if we take every way to drive out of our minds, what Providence hath taken so many ways to fix in them; it is really *fighting against God**, and that in a point of the utmost concern to us. But then the thought of our latter end is not designed to disquiet and deject us without need or use; but only to engage us in reasoning upon it so justly, and preparing for it so wisely, as that when it comes, (for sooner or later it must) we may meet it with comfort.

* Acts v. 39.

It is very true, the best preparation for sickness and death is a good life; and whilst we neglect this, no other can be effectual. But then too many have neglected it: and there is the utmost necessity for them to think, and to be assisted in thinking, of whatever they can do towards retrieving so fatal an error. Nay, with respect to others; as the rules of a good life extend to our behaviour in all circumstances, so there must be some of them peculiarly appropriated to the nearer prospect of our departure hence. And as every thing should be learnt in the best degree it can, before we want it for practice; and such things especially, as are difficult and yet of moment; so studying in our health the duties of a sick bed; contriving beforehand to make them as few and easy as possible; and forming ourselves to a disposition of going through them as we ought, is no small part of religious wisdom. If you delay, till the time of illness comes, (and who can foresee, how soon that may happen?) for some things it will be too late; of some you will be ignorant; others you will forget: and those about you too commonly will be unable, or unwilling, or afraid to remind you of them. They, whose office it is, will scarce have an opportunity given them of attending you: or if they have, will scarce know on the sudden, how to make great use of it. And upon the whole, but little will be done of what should be done.

We all pray, as often as we join in the Litany, against *sudden death*. They are undoubtedly the happiest, who have the least occasion to pray against it: but there are few if any who have none. And such, as profess to desire instead of fearing it, would do well to consider, whether they are so very sure as this implies, that every part, both of their worldly affairs and of their eternal concerns, is in the best

order and condition to which they can bring it. or whether in reality this appearing readiness to die at any time, without warning, be not merely a dread to think of dying at all, as a matter near at hand; unless it be somewhat still worse, disbelief or forgetfullness of what will follow after. But in vain do we petition that our death may not be sudden, if we resolve that it shall: which in effect we do, in proportion as we omit those provisions for the time of its coming, without which it must in the worst sense *come upon us unawares,** be its advances ever so slow.

We ought therefore to learn in health what will be incumbent on us in sickness. And since few chuse to teach themselves the precepts which belong to so unpleasing a situation, it remains, that all be taught them here: and the lesson is of universal benefit. For in his turn, every one must expect to be in a state of wearisomeness and pain, of weakness and danger: and besides the particular duties of that state, are, more or less, the general duties of human life: so that whoever is truly considerate and serious, will doubtless be glad to have them laid before him. This therefore I shall endeavour to do, in the method pointed out by the text: which mentions the obligations of sick persons,

I. Respecting their fellow-creatures: *set thine house in order.*

II. Respecting more immediately God and their own souls. *Then Hezekiah prayed unto the Lord.*

The phrase, which expresses the former, *set thine house in order,* may be translated more literally *give command concerning,* or, *to thine house.* And this direction may well be enlarged beyond our family strictly so called by a parity of reason, to compre-

* Luke xxi. 34.

hend, both such regulations of all affairs in which we are interested, and such advice to all persons, with whom we are connected, as appear needful. I shall treat of it therefore in each of these views; but at present, only in the first.

Now this includes the general, and, for ought we know, final arrangement of our worldly concerns. As these are frequently either extensive, or intricate, or perfectly understood by none but ourselves; every one ought to be careful, and since they are not, *should often be put in remembrance,* as the office for the sick in so many words appoints, *to take order for settling their temporal estates, while they are in health.* Not many, it may be feared, have reason to be contented, that every thing should lie, at the hour of their death, just as it doth now. Some have spent a great part of their lives in putting their houses out of order, in perplexing and ruining their affairs, by extravagance, negligence or ill-management. These have singular need to restore them, without delay, to the best posture they can. And such, as may have acted very prudently on the supposition of living long, may yet have done little or nothing in regard to the possibility of dying soon. Now sickness frequently affords but little time; and almost always brings along with it uneasiness full enough for us to bear, without the additional weight of business. Besides in that condition, our judgment, or memory, or attention may be impaired: weakness of spirits may subject us to undue impressions from those who are about us: our truest friends and ablest and properest advisers may be accidentally absent, or artfully kept from us: in short, one way or another, there is a great hazard of our doing things wrongly, or at best imperfectly. Fears or suspicions of this may grievously disquiet us, and add

to our danger: or, though we apprehend that no evils will arise, from our want of timely caution, to those whom we leave behind us, they may come to feel very dreadful ones. And why should not all this be prevented? We must leave what we have whether we dispose of it, or not. And if we defer disposing of it, because we have not the heart to do it; such a heart should not be indulged, but amended. The difficulty of settling things, or the uncertainty how to settle them, will scarce grow less by putting it off to the last. If any alteration of circumstances, or of our opinion, should happen after our disposition is made, it may be altered accordingly. And that strange imagination of being nearer death, for having completed this or any provision for it, is a poor absurd superstition confuted by daily experience. On the contrary, you will be more at ease, and likely to live the longer, for having done your duty in this respect. And by making sure to do it in time, you may obviate great injustice, grievous contentions and enmities, long and vast expences, where, if they be not obviated, the fault will lie at your door.

Every one therefore should take the earliest care of these matters. But if any one hath omitted it, the office before-mentioned expressly requires, that he *be admonished* in his sickness *to make his will, and to declare his debts, what he oweth, and what is owing unto him, for the better discharging of his conscience, and the quietness of his executors.* We of the Clergy have now but seldom the means allowed us of giving you this or any other admonition at such times. I hope, it is not our fault. Consider, if it be not yours. But however that be, we may and we ought to do it from the pulpit, where, speaking openly to all in general, we cannot be suspected of any private unfair

design, into whatever particulars the subject may lead us.

The principal point, at which men should aim in settling their temporal affairs, is justice: and one of the most evident branches of justice is paying debts. Our first care therefore should be never to contract debts, which we cannot reasonably hope to pay: and our next, to secure the payment of those, which we have contracted, as fully and speedily as we can. Else we shall be in continual danger of injuring, perhaps distressing and undoing persons and families, only for thinking well enough of us to trust us. It is extremely dishonourable, (I might use a harsher word) at any season of life to indulge our idleness, gratify our fancies and appetites, or support our rank at their expence. But when sickness gives us a prospect of never being just to them, unless we are so immediately, we have then every possible motive for labouring most earnestly to indemnify them. And we ought to prefer the demands, which they have upon us, before all mere proprieties, however reasonable; contrive good security for them out of whatever we fairly can; and if, after all, we cannot do it effectually, recommend them, as far as ever there is any plea for it, to the compassion of our surviving representatives and relations. But as we cannot be certain that they will, and in several cases there may be no reason why they should, do what we desire: the only sure way is, to provide, before it is too late, for doing it ourselves. If our circumstances are upon the whole sufficient to answer all claims; barely making known the debts due from us, and owing to us, or at most stating them with the parties concerned, may be enough; and where it is wanted, employing some thought and pains on such matters, as we are able,

will be doing very good service both to our creditors, and to our heirs.

But besides those, who are commonly called creditors, there is another, and much more dreadful sort: I mean those, to whom we have done injuries, and owe restitution. Injuries ought never to be done. When they are done, restitution, if it can, ought to be made immediately: and till it is offered so far as our ability extends, we remain both debtors and sinners. If we defer it to the last, we may never make it at all: and though we do, whether God will then accept it, must be doubtful: but if even then we refuse it, unless the cause be that we excusably mistake the nature of the case, we preserve no ground for hope. It is unspeakably better therefore to think seriously at any time, than never, what wrongs or what hardships any of our fellow-creatures have suffered from us: and to what suitable compensation they are intitled, either in strict justice, or in equity and good conscience. The answer to this question may often be a very afflicting one: but if men will do amiss, they must take the consequences. It may also, in some cases, be difficult to fix upon the right answer, or to find proper methods of putting it in practice, if we know it: but we must not, on account of difficulties, lay aside the thought of doing our duty; but ask the best advice, where we are at a loss: leave directions, to be executed by others, where we have not time ourselves; and at least make due acknowledgments, unless particular circumstances forbid, where we cannot make amends. Perhaps nothing further than acknowledgments will be expected by those, whom we have injured: and then we are bound to nothing further.

But as we have all more or less need to ask pardon, another of our duties evidently is, to grant it in our turn: when others have used us ill, not to *recompense*, or wish them, *evil for evil*;* not to deny them proper kindnesses; or even think of them worse than they deserve: to accept any submissions, that do but approach towards being sufficient; and be reconciled to them, not in words alone, which is adding hypocrisy to resentment, but in reality; affording them as large proofs, both of our favour and confidence, as any good and wise man, uninterested in the matter, would think fitting; seriously wishing their good, in soul, body and estate; and being ready to promote it, as far as we properly can. This is the full meaning of being in charity; which we ought to be constantly in with all men; and if the reason of our professing to be so, is merely that we imagine our end to be near; it will be extremely questionable, whether we are so indeed. Yet a late, nay an imperfect reconciliation is always preferable to none, provided there be any sincerity in it. For the expedient, to which it is said, some have had recourse, of forgiving if they die, and being revenged if they live, is as wicked and as foolish a contrivance to deceive themselves and to mock God, as the human heart can frame. We may indeed have forgiven, yet not have declared our forgiveness: and it may possibly be prudent, nay kind, in some cases to suspend that declaration, at least in part, for a while; though seldom, if ever, very long. But at farthest, when death appears to threaten us, it is high time to allow, both ourselves, and all with whom we are concerned, the comfort of seeing our differences, if possible, intirely made up: that we may lie under no imputation at our departure of any

* Rom. xii. 17.

thing unmeet for those mansions of peace, that we hope we are going to inhabit. The same office therefore, which I have already quoted more than once, requires, in particular, that the sick person *be exhorted to forgive from the bottom of his heart, all that have offended him; and if he hath offended any other, to ask them forgiveness; and where he hath done injury or wrong to any man, that he make amends to the uttermost of his power.*

The next thing, after providing for the payment of our debts, and which, like that, should be done in health, but much rather in sickness than not at all, is disposing of the remainder of our substance: a matter comprehending too great a variety of cases, to permit any other than general directions from this place. The principal rule is, that we ought not to be governed in it, to any considerable degree, by fanciful fondnesses, much less by blameable resentments: but act on such grounds, as not only we ourselves, but other men of unquestioned prudence and impartiality, think are good ones. For where we seem to be most at liberty, we are still bound to make a rational use of that liberty: and should therefore carefully judge as well as we can; and still be a little diffident whether we have judged right; not wantonly do whatever we please, and be confident that we cannot do amiss, or regardless whether we do or not. Scarce any reasons ought to exclude our children: whatever limitations and restraints may be sometimes adviseable. Nor, in default of children, should any other than very strong reasons exclude those, whom nearness of blood points out for our heirs. But then we should be content with allowing as moderate a prerogative to one of our posterity or kindred, above the rest, as our station and rank, the constitution of our country, and the es-

tablished maxims of society will admit: and not leave all our family besides, or any part of it, in undeserved straits and contempt, for the vanity of raising a single branch higher than we ought.

Another caution, often too requisite, is, that if our heirs be different from our successors in any station or office of which you are possessed; or if they, whom we are inclined to favour, be it ever so justly, are different from our legal heirs; we ought at no time, and yet less, if possible, at our latter end, to do any thing unequitable, or even unhandsome, for the advantage of the former, or to express our dislike of the latter. Mean behaviour will sully our characters, and generous behaviour give a lustre to them, on these occasions, beyond most others. For to act right against our own interest, or that of our favourites, is peculiarly honourable: and to act wrong, when we are just going to account for our actions, is peculiarly shocking.

Other things yet, (sometimes duties, and almost always proprieties) belonging to this part of the subject, are, gifts to worthy and useful friends, answerable to the intimacy in which we have lived with them, and to their occasions for such kindness: also recompences to domestics in proportion to their services compared with the exigency of their circumstances. But however we may be at liberty in relation to some of these points, we are strictly bound to the observation of another rule, with respect to all, who are about us in our sickness; of a different nature indeed from the preceding ones, but which it is much better to mention here, than to omit; that we shew them peculiarly at that time, great humanity and goodness: not requiring from them more fatiguing or constant attendance, than is fit; nor more care, skill and dex-

terity, than is to be expected: recollecting, that our illness inclines us to imagine things amiss, in a degree beyond reality; and that others ought not to suffer merely because we do: thinking often, how disagreeable an office they go through, and what benefit and comfort we receive from it: begging them to forgive us those hasty sallies of fretfulness and impatience, that sometimes will escape us; and making them good amends in every way that we can, for all the trouble, which they take about us.

Another article, usually considered along with some, of which I have just been speaking, is the manner of our funeral. And it may sometimes be very proper to direct this ourselves, in order to keep our friends from the imprudence of a too expensive, or the imputation of a too frugal one. Now we shall undoubtedly give a proof, both of humility and good sense, by avoiding, (unless motives of a public nature demand it) all appearance of ostentation, at a time that shews the vanity of worldly pomp in so strong a light; and appointing that only such regard be paid to our dead body, as may express our faith of its rising again; together with so much deference to custom, as may preserve us from the charge of a singularity affected without reason. Nor let it be thought, that religion hath nothing to do with several of these matters, which I have now specified. It hath to do with every matter, where there is a right and a wrong: and *whatsoever things are venerable, whatsoever things are lovely and of good report,* you are to *think on these things*:* and that you may, we are to teach them.

But there is another point, of much greater importance, expressly enjoined in the office for the sick: that the *minister should not omit earnestly to move*

* Phil. iv. 8.

such as are of ability, to be liberal to the poor. Our charity ought indeed to shine forth uniformly, and warm those, who need it, though our whole life: not make a sudden blaze, to dazzle the eyes of others and our own, at the close of it. What we give in our health, we give away from ourselves; and we may know, and the world must presume, that we do it from a willing heart: whereas delaying it to the last hath too much the look of a shallow design to bribe God, and catch the applause of our fellow creatures, with what we can keep no longer. However, they who have always been charitable, should still go on to the end, exercising the same virtue: which hath great promises made to it from God in sickness. *Blessed is he that considereth the poor: the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble. The Lord will preserve him, and keep him alive:—The Lord will strengthen him upon the bed of languishing.** They again, who could not give so much in their lives, as they wished, can sometimes very properly give considerably at their deaths; which doubtless God will graciously accept: and they who have neglected this duty carelessly, or even wilfully, had much better, on conviction, amend late, than never. Therefore all should examine, what is incumbent on them: and supply their deficiencies, if they have been guilty of any. Such as have in no way done much for the poor, in proportion to their circumstances, may be sure they have not done enough. Such as imagine they have done them great good by the expences of their luxury and pride, should think, whether they have not done them, or others, as much or more harm by the same means. And even they, who have done the most real and unmixed good, ought still to remember, that

* Ps. xli. 1, 2, 3.

they have only been so far truly charitable, as charity was in truth their inward motive. These considerations may give many cause to increase their beneficence, under the attacks of diseases, or the decline of health. But then they must carefully avoid all vainglory in it: else our Saviour hath told them, that in *being seen of men they have their* whole *reward:** nor do they always obtain even the applause which they seek. They must likewise guard against all conceit of merit: and look on themselves not as making a present, but as paying a debt, to God and their brethren; and that so imperfectly, as to be acquitted of sin only through him, who died to procure acceptance for their best performances. Whatever is done thus, though it should fail of the intent, yet exercises the true spirit of almsgiving as usefully to us, as if it succeeded. But still we should exercise it with all the prudence we can: else we may tempt the objects of our liberality to idleness or debauchery; and perhaps the present or future managers of it to fraud. Yet the danger of either abuse ought to make us, not less bountiful, but only more circumspect; and as early in our benefactions as possible, that we may bestow or settle them in the properest manner, which is very difficult in a hurry at the last.

And here it may be useful to observe, that besides the common charities, to which the present age, with all its faults, is remarkably well inclined, there are various other ways of doing good. Sometimes a great deal may be done without any expence; as by making public beneficial discoveries: and the possessors of such secrets are bound in conscience not to let them be lost. Sometimes again, what is no particular charity to any certain man, may be a great and extensive

* Math. vi. 1, 2.

benefit to mankind: as foundations for the study, or rewards for the improvement, of arts or sciences. And lastly what may seem to contribute nothing to the temporal advantage of men may contribute to it more than any thing: or were it ever so little, may be of unspeakable service to what is of infinitely greater importance, their eternal hapiness: as benefactions for the support, and serious and decent exercise, of religion. If religion be a truth, (and conscientious preparation for death plainly confesses it is) providing for the maintenance and honour of it, must be a duty: and many have been so niggardly, so unjust to it, in the days of their health, that they will find they owe it large compensations, if they reflect as they ought, in time of sickness.

But then the utmost care should be taken to avoid all those errors, by which the improvident donations of former ages have brought so unhappy a disesteem at present on the most rational acts of this part of piety: acts however to be more earnestly recommended, and more liberally performed by such as do acknowledge its value, because such great numbers do not. Only we must never imagine, that the larger alms or oblations can purchase us either a licence or a pardon, (otherwise than as all true marks of repentance contribute towards the latter) for any kind of sin, particularly of injustice. God himself hath said: *I the Lord love judgment: I hate robbery for burnt offering.** Nor must we rob our own families, more than strangers, of what they are entitled to. But then they are not entitled to all, that we can possibly leave them: but an equitable share of it is due to religious and charitable uses. If indeed we have given a competent proportion before, and know that they,

* Isaiah lxi. 8.

whom we shall leave to represent us, if we die, have the same disposition; that may suffice. For different circumstances require different methods to be taken. And therefore the Scripture observes, that *a good man will guide his affairs with discretion.** But one part of that discretion it hath expressly declared to be *dispersing abroad, and giving to the poor:*† which whoever doth in a right manner, will be likely to obtain a return of God's bounties, to his family, as well as himself: in their temporal concerns as well as their spiritual, if that be really best for them. *His seed shall be mighty upon earth: the generation of the faithful shall be blessed. Riches and plenteousness shall be in his house: his righteousness endureth for ever.*‡

* Ps. cxii. 5. † Ver. 9. ‡ Ps. cxii. 2, 3.

SERMON XIII.

ISAIAH xxxviii. 1, 2.

IN THOSE DAYS WAS HEZEKIAH SICK UNTO DEATH ; AND ISAIAH THE PROPHET, THE SON OF AMOZ, CAME UNTO HIM, AND SAID UNTO HIM, THUS SAITH THE LORD, SET THINE HOUSE IN ORDER : FOR THOU SHALT DIE, AND NOT LIVE. THEN HEZEKIAH TURNED HIS FACE TOWARDS THE WALL, AND PRAYED UNTO THE LORD.

IN discoursing lately on these words, after reminding you of the uncertainty of life and health, and the need of preparing for sickness and death before either of them appears to be at hand, I proposed to assist you in this good work, by laying before you the duties of the sick.

I. Respecting their fellow-creatures.

II. Respecting more immediately God and their own souls.

I. The former, I observed to you, are expressed in the text by the words, *Set thine house in order,* or, translating more literally, *Give command concerning,* or, *to thine house.* And this direction may well be enlarged to comprehend, both due regulations of all affairs in which the sick are interested, and proper advice to all persons with whom they are connected. In the first of these views I have already treated of it.

And proceed now to the next point, that of needful advice to those of our own family, our relations and domestics, with whom may well be joined at least our

friends, and those with whom we have lived in familiarity.

It is a character, which God gives of Abraham with marks of great approbation, *I know him, that he will command his children, and his houshold after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and judgment.** Undoubtedly both he and the other good Patriarchs performed this duty through their whole lives, as we should also; but we find it recorded of several of them, and therefore may presume it of the rest, that they gave more solemn admonitions to their families at their deaths, in which too our imitation of them is highly requisite. For the dying words, and those which probably may be such, of parents and masters to their children and servants, of friends to their friends, and of worthy persons to such as respect them, naturally make an uncommon impression. The occasion is awful; the minds of the hearers are usually tender and affectionate; apt to condemn their former disregards, and to receive what is now said, as carrying in it a peculiar obligation and sacredness: besides that it may often render forsaking bad customs and acting right much the easier to them, if they can say, (what the world will regard more than a better reason) that such was the dying injunction of such a friend.

You will therefore surely improve such an opportunity, as their prospect of being deprived of you, though not a certain one, affords you for this excellent purpose. If you have always, or for a considerable time, led a pious life, you will testify to all about you, that you have found it the sure way to inward peace, and that you feel the faith and love of God a strong support in your present hour of suffering and trial. If

* Gen. xviii. 19.

you have been remiss and negligent you will excite them, by speaking of the remorse which it gives you, to more care and zeal. If you have fallen into gross and public sins, you will express to them fully a deep sense of your guilt. For be assured, that taking shame to yourself thus would be true honour, both in the eyes of God and man. Warn others therefore against the rocks on which you have split, and beseech them to learn, by your sad experience, without wanting to add their own. If they are well disposed and good, give them the pleasure of knowing that you rejoice in it; and exhort them to persevere with tokens of a cheerful confidence that they will. If you discern faults or weak sides in them, or dangers to which they will be liable, caution them, not harshly, but in the kindest and most persuasive manner, to avoid, for your sake as well as their own, what you foresee will else prove hurtful, if not fatal to them: and beg of them, that, if they should notwithstanding go wrong, the remembrance of your words may at least, when they find they have, prevail on them to retreat in time. If you have neglected instructing them in essential points, acknowledge it to them with sorrow, and be earnest with them to make themselves amends. If you have instilled into them, by discourse or example, any false notions, whether speculative or practical, labour to set them right as completely as you can. But, throughout the whole of your endeavours, exact no promises from them that may be snares; lay no burthen upon them that may prove too heavy; let nothing superstitious, or any way unreasonable, nothing that can be imputed only to the weakness of your condition, enter into the charge that you leave with them. Surely I need not add, (if you have any sense of religion) that you are yet less to enjoin them,

what may gratify resentment, perpetuate variance, or engage them in transgressing the least of God's laws. For it would be the vilest abuse of a death-bed influence to extort from them, by means of it, assurances which it must be a sin to give, and a still greater to fulfill.

It frequently happens, that when men approach very near to their end, they are ill able to exhort even those, who are about them, distinctly and properly. But therefore you should be always doing it in a sufficient degree, that you may have less need to say much to them at last. And when a threatening sickness comes, you should take occasions of speaking, before it is gone too far; but rather force yourself to say a little, though late, than omit it intirely. And be not in the least afraid that then you may happen to express convictions and good resolutions that will not last, and urge upon others better advice than you shall follow yourselves, if you recover; but consider it as one very weighty reason more for these admonitions, that such a declaration of your sentiments will assist in tying you down to them; and directing their future behaviour will greatly contribute to secure your own. Some indeed are at no time capable of using many words to advantage. But perhaps you can use a few that shall have the effect of many; at least, you can recommend a valuable acquaintance, an instructive awakening book, attendance on public worship, serious recollection from time to time, humble prayer to God in private. If therefore it be possible, fail not to make some advantage of what may prove your last opportunity. Think how dreadful will it be, if your children, your servants, your friends, should have ground to say to you in the day of judgment, "Had you in your life taught me any thing but sin, and

folly, or trifles; had you at your death warned me of my duty and my danger, my condition might have been intirely the reverse of what now it must be for ever." And, on the contrary, what delight will it bring you, not only to see them happy along with you, but to hear them acknowledge, that you were the cause of it; and to enjoy their gratitude, as part of your reward to all eternity!

I now proceed to lay before you,

II. The duties of the sick respecting more immediately God and their own souls; to which our thoughts are naturally turned by the words, *Then Hezekiah prayed unto the Lord:* for every sentiment of piety may be expressed in prayer.

His prayer, indeed, if the whole of it be recorded in Scripture, was only that he might recover; a request, which for the public good, he had urgent reasons to make in the first place. And that being instantly granted, he had no need to apply further to God, in relation to his sickness, otherwise than by thanksgiving, which he did. But they who have more extensive wants at that time, are both authorized and bound to enlarge in proportion the subject of their addresses to the throne of grace; and therefore I shall endeavour to comprehend under this head all the religious duties of the sick.

Great multitudes, in this nation as well as others, have formerly thought, and too many think still, that they can be acceptable to God by acts of devotion, without equitable and kind behaviour to men, or virtuous government of themselves; which persuasion hath produced an absurd, useless, nay, mischievous kind of religion in some, and contempt, and even hatred of all religion in others. But amongst us, at present, much the largest number build their hopes

of future happiness, if they have any, on their performance, such as it is, of moral obligations; with little or no regard, either in their lives or at their deaths, to dictates of piety, scriptural or natural: at least, beyond a few formalities, negligently practised now and then, just as they please. Indeed very many seem to fancy that the time of sickness is the unfittest of all others for attending to such subjects; that then persons ought to think as little as possible, and of the most insignificant things they can. Now, if they are but able to keep God out of their minds when they are ill, it is easy to do it when they are well; and so all goes no as they wish.

But though it be a most fatal mistake to believe, that every thing may be done at our latter end, yet it is also a very pernicious one to apprehend, that nothing can be done when the danger of it seems to approach. For that season furnishes most favourable opportunities for such reflections and such behaviour, as will not only produce the happiest effects of all sorts if we recover, but greatly better our future condition, if we die. And though in some distempers, especially some periods of them, religious meditations, agitating the sick very strongly, would only disorder their minds, and increase the hazard of their lives: yet in others they are unspeakably the surest relief: and where they do give uneasiness, which they are far from doing always, will soon afford, if they are pursued as they ought, most valuable degrees of comfort and peace. On all accounts therefore, he, who hath a right to our continual and most awful attention in every part of life, ought to have it paid him peculiarly in that part which reminds us of appearing soon before him. Not that it is our duty in the least to imagine distempers worse than they are,

to lay stress on idle forebodings, or to despair of life even when juster grounds of apprehension appear. For *God, who raiseth the dead**, can raise us from the nearest approach to death, whenever he will. But yet every indisposition is a call from heaven, and some are very loud ones, to think of mortality; and to *remember* him, who should never be forgot, *our Creator*†, from whom we come, and to whom we shall return.

Now the first principle of all regard to God is faith. And it would be well if many, who are far from suspecting themselves of any tendency towards atheism, would seriously ask their hearts, what proof they give of having in earnest so much as the faith of natural religion; whether they have considered themselves as under the obligation of paying conscientiously to their Maker the obedience and the worship, which reason requires. But supposing they have; reason shews to sinners (and we are all such) what they have to do, but in part: and what they have to hope or fear, so very imperfectly, that, however men may persuade themselves to think otherwise in the days of high spirits and presumptuous imaginations; yet, when sickness brings their future account near to their view, they will find, that nothing could have directed them so rightly through life as God's written law; and nothing can support them under the terrors of death, like that covenant-right to pardon and eternal happiness, which is there alone offered to mankind; and even there, on this condition alone, that they trust, not in their own righteousness, not in their own repentance, not in their own endeavours, not in their own amendment, for God's acceptance, but intirely in his mercy through the merits of Jesus Christ; and

* 2 Cor. i. 9. † Eccl. xii. 1.

so trust in that, as thankfully to yield themselves up to the influence of his blessed Spirit, and in this strength to labour after that universal *holiness* of life and heart *without which no man shall see the Lord**. Therefore convince yourself without delay of the truth and importance of this gracious covenant, which, to a thoughtful humble mind will soon be visible; and if you are convinced, intitle yourself without delay to a share in it, and watchfully preserve this foundation from being at any time undermined; that in health and prosperity you may stand firm against worldly allurements, and in sickness and adversity against despondence.

There are indeed very good persons, who, in illnesses, particularly of some sorts, are often tempted to partial, or even total unbelief. And if any seeming reasons for it be suggested to their minds, they ought to inquire after, and oppose to them reasonable answers. But where little or nothing lies at the bottom but low spirited fears that they do not believe at all, or not sufficiently, what their very solicitude, and their whole conduct shews they do; or difficulties about abstruse points, that need not be cleared up, and perhaps, in this world at least, never will or can: the right way is, to throw them all aside as far as we are able; to pray to God, that he would free us from anxiety about them in his good time; to be disturbed the least that is possible for us, if the same scruples and weaknesses, after some interval, return, which they are very apt to do; and, with the strength that we have remaining, stand by the judgments made in our better days: which, if we have been serious and considerate, are much the likeliest to be true, and being on the side of religion, must be safe; for we

* Heb. xii. 14.

may gain by it infinitely, but lose we cannot. And amongst the doctrines of religion we should not perplex our heads with disputable matters, when we are least of all fit for them, but dwell on such plain acknowledged points, as may best afford us the direction or comfort which we want in our present circumstances.

Being settled thus on the ground-work of faith, our next concern will be to examine the suitableness of our past behaviour to it. Self-examination is a constant duty, but especially requisite when we have the most immediate need to know and amend our condition; besides that possibly it may discover to us some fault of ours, for which the hand of God is laid upon us, and so enable us to obtain the removal of it. An inquiry, which will shew the best of men but too much amiss in them, will doubtless be to most a painful employment; above all, when they have sufferings enough to bear, besides that of a *wounded spirit**. And why then should we not lighten this burthen beforehand, by avoiding to act wrong, which is the only sure way; or, which is the next, by rectifying it instantly? But whatever we have made necessary, we must support; and being awakened to present remorse, is unspeakably better than going on in a dream to future misery. Directions for making this inquiry must be learnt from the discourses that professedly treat of it. But the chief are these: to compare the whole of our actions, words and thoughts, as well as we are able, with the rule of our duty, conscientiously, and yet coolly; neither accusing ourselves of what we have not done amiss, nor suppressing what we have; neither disturbing our own peace on account of mere infirmities, nor disguising wilful sins under gentle appellations; remem-

* Prov. xviii. 14.

bering, that God is merciful and good, yet remembering also, that he is just and holy; reflecting, that we are in his presence, and praying, that he would make us known to ourselves.

After discovering thus how we have been guilty, we must examine also how far we have repented. Now repentance implies disapprobation of what we have done ill, and consequently sorrow for it; without which inward change an outward alteration of our conduct will avail us nothing. But whether the concern, even of great sinners, be vehement and passionate, or silent and composed, is of small moment, provided it be real and deep. Sorrow, that we have acted contrary to our interest, is a rational principle; that we have transgressed the rule of morals, is a virtuous one; that we have disobeyed our heavenly Father, is a religious one. And whoever is truly moved by all these considerations, it will be an useless and hurtful nicety for him to disquiet himself about the proportion in which they are mixed, if together they do but produce the proper effect. And this effect may and will be different in different cases. Our concern for mere frailties, if it make us humble and watchful, will be accepted, though it doth not prevent some relapses into the same failings. But our penitence for gross and deliberate sins must evidence itself by forsaking them, else it hath no claim to pardon. And indeed the repentance, encouraged by so many noble promises in the New Testament, is that which accompanied the conversion of Jews and Heathens to Christianity; but the remission of wilful offences, committed after professing it, (and we have professed it from our childhood) will be found very sparingly mentioned. For it is expected of Christians to keep the laws of Christ,

else they *receive his grace in vain.** However, there are, God be thanked, assurances of mercy given to the worst of us, on returning from our transgressions. But none are given to sorrow without amendment. If any were, the whole intent of the Gospel would be defeated, and Christ be made the *minister of sin.*†

We must not therefore imagine, that a little, or a great deal of grief in sickness, if we could be sure of feeling it then, which we cannot, will intitle us to forgiveness. For the bitterest of such anguish may have neither piety nor virtue in it, but be merely the concern of a malefactor, (continuing in his heart as much so as ever) that he is likely to be punished for his deeds. Or suppose there be some convictions of a better kind, grounded even on Christian faith; yet when there is no time for trying what fruits they will bring forth, and when multitudes, after the like convictions, have immediately or soon relapsed into their old iniquities, what dependance can there be upon them? God indeed knows, if they would, in case of recovery, be effectual; but he who feels them hath no means of knowing it. And were he certain that they would, how doth it appear, that when they come so late, they will be accepted? The penitent thief, whose pardon is the chief argument alledged to prove this point, might possibly repent long before he was taken, might be taken long before he was executed, might have no knowledge of the Gospel, till he hung with our Saviour upon the cross; and he exercised there a faith so circumstanced, as ours cannot be: on all which accounts there is no room for a parallel to be drawn between him and wicked Christians now, who continue obdurate till the approach of death.

And what shall we say then concerning them? The

* 2 Cor. vi. 9. † Gal. ii. 17.

mild spirit of our religion will not permit us to judge harshly of them; Faithfulness to the souls of men will not suffer us to pronounce in their favour. All we can determine with certainty therefore is, that such repentance as they still remain capable of, united with Christian faith, is the best and only thing to which they can have recourse. Right behaviour then will certainly make their case in some degree better; and wrong behaviour, even then, when every thing conspires to remind them of what they ought to have remembered sooner, must make it unspeakably worse. Their duty therefore is clear, be their hopes ever so doubtful; and there is always room for some hope whilst life is preserved. They may have more time, they may have more mercy granted them, than they can see cause to expect. God is not, even in their case, a cruel Being enraged, but a wise and good one justly displeased. Frightening themselves beyond a capacity of thinking and acting reasonably must do harm, be their spiritual condition ever so dangerous. They cannot know it to be desperate, and therefore ought by no means to give it up. Still, on the other hand, though God may assure them internally of pardon and happiness, yet in general very strong persuasions of that kind, in such circumstances, are greatly to be suspected as enthusiastic, delusive imaginations: and the modester and less confident men are, the better grounded is their prospect. But so extremely uncomfortable a one will it ordinarily prove, that there is great weight in the Son of Sirach's precept: *Before judgment examine thyself, and in the day of visitation thou shalt find mercy. Humble thyself before thou be sick: in the time of sins shew repentance—and defer not until death to be justified.**

* Ecclus xviii. 20, 21, 22.

The penitence, left to a bed of languishing, ought to be only the more solemn completion of that which we practised daily in our health. And most of us have so much to rectify, and all have so much need to do it well, be it more or less, that we should not fail to take the earliest and surest time for it; when it will be most acceptable to God, and most advantageous to our own souls; when there will be least ground for doubt and scruple afterwards, whether we left our sins, or they left us; whether we acted on ingenuous, or servile motives. But whatever we have unhappily omitted till sickness calls, let us then at least set about it instantly; not be ashamed of repenting, or being known to repent, for it is in sinning that the only shame lies; not be satisfied with feeling, and owning to men a sense of our guilt, as far as it relates to them; but confess to God our disobedience and ingratitude to him, with the deeper contrition, the longer we have neglected it. Hezekiah's prayer indeed hath no confession of sin, but his thanksgiving afterwards hath a very strong one: *Thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back.** And therefore, when he pleaded at first, *Remember, O Lord, I beseech thee, how I have walked before thee with a perfect heart, and done that which is good in thy sight,*† we should understand him to mean, that as a king he had been zealous for God's true religion, to which consequently his life was of importance; not that as a man he had not deserved death, which all men have. And if we are convinced in any due degree what our deserts have been, we shall intreat the divine mercy, not for the merits, I said it before, and I say it again, not for the merits of our good actions, for the best of them are faulty; not for the sake of our repentance, which in strictness undoes nothing

* Is. xxxviii. 17. † Ver. 3.

that we have done amiss, and therefore (though our natural power extends no further) cannot intitle us even to exemption from punishment, much less to eternal rewards; but solely through his satisfaction and intercession, who died to obtain both for us.

A just sense of this invaluable blessing will effectually incline us to join with our thankful humiliations, a zealous performance of whatever duties are opposite to our past sins, and whatever mortifications are proper to correct our present evil tendencies. But no useless and fanciful observances, nor any austerities, calculated only to give uneasiness for the sake of giving it, should ever enter into a Christian's penitence. For such things take off the attention from real obligations, and fix it on themselves, as matters of the greatest moment: whence the punctual performers of them are tempted to spiritual pride; and others, who see this great stress laid on them, are induced either to esteem them without cause, or to disesteem religion, falsely supposing it to enjoin them. Therefore the Scripture directs returning offenders neither to empty forms, nor to the rigours of corporal discipline, any farther than to such occasional use of fasting, as may be found beneficial, but *to do justly and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with their God.** And least of all should the sick be harrassed with needless burthens. For they have one already, of no small weight, laid on them by God himself; I mean the disease which he hath inflicted, and bearing that as they ought, will seldom fail to be labour sufficient.

Merely feeling the pressure of it indeed will do us no service, without attending properly to him from whom it comes. On the contrary, when God saith, *In vain have I smitten your children, they received*

* Mic. vi. 8.

*no correction,** it implies, that they were hardened in wickedness; whereas, when *the voice of the Lord crieth, the man of wisdom will hear the rod, and who hath appointed it.*† Yet still worse would it be, if, perceiving whence our sufferings proceed, we should be wrongly affected towards the Author of them; either with their blasphemous vehemence, of whom the Scripture foretels, *They shall fret themselves, and curse their God, and look upwards;*‡ or with his profane despondency, who said, *This evil is from the Lord, why should I wait for the Lord any longer?*§ But if we apply to him with humble confession, and sincere amendment, like Ephraim in Jeremiah, *Thou hast chastised me, and I was chastised; after I was instructed, I smote upon my thigh, I was ashamed, yea, even confounded:*‖ we shall have cause to say with the Psalmist, *It is good for me that I have been in trouble, that I might learn thy statutes.*¶ We should learn our duty from God's mercies, but if these make us forget him, chastisement is fitly employed to make us recollect him. *I will cause you to pass under the rod, and bring you into the bond of the covenant;—and ye shall remember your ways, and all your doings, wherein ye have been defiled:—and ye shall loath yourselves in your own sight, and know, that I am the Lord.*** *By this shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit to take away his sins.*†† When therefore God *hideth his face* from us, and *we are troubled*‡‡ with uneasiness of body or mind, though it may be only *to make* us, like the *Captain of our salvation, perfect through sufferings;*§§ yet we shall do well to inquire with humility, though

* Jer. ii. 30. † Mic. vi. 9. ‡ Is. viii. 21. § 2 Kings vi. 33.
‖ Jer. xxxi. 18, 19. ¶ Ps. cxix. 71. ** Ezek. xx. 37, 43, 44.
†† Is. xxvii. 9. ‡‡ Ps. civ. 29. §§ Heb. ii. 10.

not with causeless terror, whether his purpose is not what the Prophet declares in his name: *I will go, and return to my place, till they acknowledge their offence;—in their affliction they will seek me early.** If on self-examination we find little or nothing but common frailties to charge upon ourselves, we shall have abundant reason to rejoice in all our tribulations, and be thankful to his preventing grace. If we discover grosser failings, our concern is, to answer the divine expectation, as the next verse directs: *Come, and let us return unto the Lord, for he hath torn, and he will heal us; he hath smitten, and he will bind us up.*† Such behaviour will procure us the removal, or mitigation of our sufferings at present, if infinite wisdom sees it best for us. But however this be, it will certainly obtain for us that future recompence of everlasting felicity, which the words, that follow there, naturally express, perhaps with an allusion to the time of our Lord's resurrection, the foundation and first-fruits of the general one: *After two days will he revive us, in the third day he will raise us up, and we shall live in his sight.*‡

* Hos. v. 15. † Ib. vi. 1. ‡ Ver. 2.

SERMON XIV.

ISAIAH xxxviii. 1, 2.

IN THOSE DAYS WAS HEZEKIAH SICK UNTO DEATH; AND ISAIAH THE PROPHET, THE SON OF AMOZ, CAME UNTO HIM, AND SAID UNTO HIM, THUS SAITH THE LORD, SET THINE HOUSE IN ORDER: FOR THOU SHALT DIE, AND NOT LIVE. THEN HEZEKIAH TURNED HIS FACE TOWARDS THE WALL, AND PRAYED UNTO THE LORD.

FROM these words I have proposed to shew you the duties of sick persons,

I. Respecting their fellow-creatures; expressed by the direction, *set thine house in order:*

II. Respecting more immediately God and their own souls; intimated in the good king's behaviour, *Then Hezekiah prayed unto the Lord.*

The former of these I have finished, and made some progress in the latter: under which, after setting before you, in general, the necessity of having regard to God in our sickness; I proceeded to the particular obligations, first of faith in his Word (giving at the same time directions to those, who are disquieted by doubts and scruples); then of self-examination in his presence; then of such repentance, as our case requires. And here I insisted largely on the danger of trusting to a death-bed sorrow; and yet the usefulness of feeling and expressing then, rather than never, a due concern for our past sins: which I observed to you, must always be accompanied with earnest petitions

for pardon, offered up in the name of our blessed Redeemer; and for assistance from the grace of the holy Spirit; with rational and scriptural, not superstitious, proofs of our humiliation; and a hearty desire to amend and improve under the discipline of Heaven.

I now go on to remind you farther, that together with these, the sick ought to be very constant in every other exercise of private piety. For as they are cut off from active life, they have more leisure for religious contemplation. And as they want all the improvement and comfort, which they can have; so they will receive the most of both, by frequent lifting up of their hearts to *the God of patience and consolation,** the Giver of all good, in addresses carefully suited to their present condition. But usually, if not always, the right manner of doing this will be, not to set yourselves tasks of reading, or meditating, or praying, just so often, or so long; but to observe with impartiality and discretion, what really edifies, and what only flatters you; as also, what your strength and spirits will permit, without suffering by it. And if there be need, you should allow other persons of skill and seriousness to judge for you in this matter; following their decisions with some degree of implicit obedience. And should it prove, that with your best management you can neither pray to God, nor think of him, with any thing near the affection and fervency, which you find expressed in many good books, and shewn by many good Christians, when sick; but in a poor, imperfect, broken, languid manner: bear with yourselves for what you cannot help; and be assured, that your heavenly Father will bear with you, and will accept the service of which your weakness is capable, be it ever so small.

* Rom. xv. 5.

Nay further; should your condition be such as to require a considerable share of your hours to be spent in a thoughtless trifling way; submit to it, as part of your duty; and do it without scruple. Were you indeed to make amusements your choice, as the means of banishing serious thought, that would be a great and dangerous sin. To throw away the time of sickness after throwing away that of health; and imagine it too soon for you to think of religion, while you are well; and too much for you, when you are ill: is a method, which must end unhappily. But in the necessary intervals of attention to better things; when, if you were not to spend your hours thus, you would spend them worse; when your spirits would sink, and your patience wear out: then cheerful discourses, or any relaxations, that are innocent, that will revive no wrong impressions, and excite no blamable movements of mind, may be very useful: provided, that if you have indulged them too much before, you firmly bind yourselves now to be wiser for the future, if God continue your life; and that you give earnest of it, by employing no more of your time thus, than is requisite, in order to employ the rest better. For *miserable comforters** are these things, alone: and wretched creatures they, who have no other to depend on. Whatever superficial palliative remedies it may be needful to intermix, the fundamental support of a pious mind will ever be that of the Psalmist: *Why art thou so heavy, O my soul; and why art thou so disquieted within me? O put thy trust in God.*†

The causes of dejection in sickness are of many sorts: but religion hath a perfect cure, if suitably applied, for every one of them, as will appear by going through the chief.

* Job xvi. 2. † Ps. xliii. 5, 6.

Some have so painful a conviction of their own guilt, though perhaps by no means uncommonly great, that they fear it can never obtain pardon. Yet, by the influence of God's grace, they have quitted the more wilful of their sins long ago, and watch against the rest with constant care; they have the firmest belief in general of God's love to mankind through Christ, and in their more composed hours receive much comfort from their own happy change. But still at other times, and especially when they think of their end, as probably approaching, their hopes are depressed by a load of terrors, and tormenting apprehensions, that they are not qualified *to find mercy of the Lord in that day*.* Indeed they rather conceive, that more advantageous thoughts of their condition would be presumptuous, and increase their condemnation. But certainly it is no part of our duty at all, to think worse of ourselves than the truth: but a fault, to be *swallowed up with overmuch sorrow*,† when our heavenly Father invites us to thankfulness and joy; as doubtless he doth every one, who repents, believes and obeys. In that case therefore, questioning whether his goodness extends to us, is doing it an injury. And often these very persons are sensible of this; but misled by it into a second error. They first imagine their transgressions cannot be forgiven; then have scruples, whether this imagination can be forgiven: and thus are miserable successively on each account, whereas they need not be so on either. For their distrust is involuntary, mere infirmity: which God will never impute to them, if they confess it to him, and strive against it as well as they can; but will hear their prayers, and grant them relief in his good time.

* 2 Tim. i. 18. † 2 Cor. ii. 7.

Others are persuaded that their sickness is a judgment, inflicted on them for this or that particular fault; and they cannot bear the weight of the Almighty's anger. But perhaps his intent is, not to punish, but to warn and preserve, or merely to try, and to improve you. *For whom the Lord loveth, he chasteneth: and scourgeth every Son, whom he receiveth.** Or if he is displeased, would not letting you go on unchecked have been a far more dreadful judgment? He now calls you to repent, and amend: and when you have done that, he may take off his hand. Or should he extend his correction even *to the destruction of the flesh,* yet by the very means of that wholesome severity, your *spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.*† Since therefore you have happily avoided the common extreme, of *despising the chastening of the Lord,* avoid but also the other, of *fainting when you are rebuked of him,*‡ and all will be well.

Some again, upon whom infirmities continue long, make heavy complaints, that they are become useless and good for nothing. But what need have you to be good for more, than your Maker sees proper? If it be his will to make you of little use, is there not great dutifulness, and therefore great reward, in submitting to it? Yet, after all, may not you be of excellent use, by the example of suffering piously and cheerfully; and by shewing the world, that religion can enable you to give up every thing else? But you had designs, it may be, of doing much good; and shall leave them abortive or imperfect. Why, God will accept your intention, and complete your designs in his own time and way; possibly still by your hands, notwithstanding appearances. But you

* Heb. xii. 6. † 1 Cor. v. 5. ‡ Heb. xii. 5.

are unable, in your present condition, to make any provision for your family; perhaps are a burthen to it: and during your illness, or after your death, they that belong to you will be destitute. Why, if this danger have arisen from any past neglect of yours, you have cause to be concerned for it; yet no more cause to sink under it, than under your other faults: and may humbly hope, that God will be good to your relations and dependents, though you have been deficient. But if you could not help what hath happened, or is likely to happen; commit them cheerfully to him, as you do yourselves; and take comfort from his own words: *Leave thy fatherless children; I will preserve them alive: and let thy widows trust in me.** All this while, you have been only his instrument in supporting them: when he lays you aside, he will make use of some other. And though you may not in the least foresee particularly, what will become of them; yet you well know in general, and let this suffice you, that *a father of the fatherless, and a judge of the widows, is God in his holy habitation.*† Pray for them therefore earnestly, and take all prudent worldly measures on their behalf; but never be anxious about them. And yet, if you cannot avoid being a little so, remember, that some small excess of kind and laudable affection is an amiable failing; and some defect of faith in trying circumstances hath often been chargeable on very sincerely pious men.

But farther: to many, who are young, it is a heavy grief in their sickness, that far from being blessed with length of days, they are likely to be cut off in their early years, without approaching to what they had considered as the common term of human life. But frequently such persons regain by degrees a

* Jer. xlix. 11. † Ps. lxviii. 5.

comfortable state of health, and outlast a great part of their cotemporaries. Or suppose they do not: very few in proportion arrive at old age; and perhaps one half of mankind leave the world before they attain their full growth. God knew best, when it was fit you should come into life: and he knows best also, when and how it is fit you should go out of it. If you are not ready for a change, it is your own fault: you must endeavour to become so, as soon and as well as you can; and others must take warning by you. But if you are prepared, how happy is your case, as the book of Wisdom describes it! *He pleased God, and was beloved of him: so that, living amongst sinners, he was translated: yea speedily was he taken away, lest wickedness should alter his understanding, or deceit beguile his soul.** How you would use a longer space, what would befal you in it, you cannot possibly tell: but there have been such multitudes, to whom dying in their prime would have been the greatest felicity, with respect to this world and the next; that if he, who sees all things, sees proper to appoint it for any of us; we have abundant cause to lay down our heads quietly, without murmuring.

Still, the desire of life is natural; and, if tempered with due submission, always innocent, sometimes highly virtuous; for it may be strengthened by reasons, private or public, of great moment. And doubtless for such it was, that so much of Hezekiah's prayer, as the Scripture mentions, was plainly intended to plead for his being spared. God may bring us into danger, only to give us, what we commonly want, a stronger sense of our dependence on him: and this end being obtained, he may continue us here, to do him the service, for which he hath thus qualified us. But when

* Wisd. iv. 10, 11.

it appears a determined call to us, to *arise and depart*;* however *weak the flesh* may be, let the *spirit* be *willing*,† and say, *I come, to do thy will, O God*:‡ yet without reckoning a considerable degree of inward reluctance, if we should feel it, a sin; or even too great a degree to be either a heinous offence, or a bad sign upon the whole. Our blessed Lord himself, who chose to suffer every thing, which might instruct us, was probably on that account not entirely exempt from dread of death: but he was entirely obedient under it; and thus furnished us with the fullest proof, that infirmity of nature is very different from rebellion of will, and very consistent with perfect resignation. Indeed so far as reason can influence, the virtuous have much more reason of the two, to fear life, than death. The former is beset round with afflictions and hazards: the terrors of going through the latter depend, in a great measure, to all appearance, on imagination. This world, we are sure, hath little good in it: the next hath every thing, that we can wish: why should we be unwilling then to make the exchange? At the hour of our departure, we are still in the same hands, in which we have always been. And therefore should we not say, from the bottom of our hearts: *Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me.*§

But some are not so much afraid of dying, as of the painful and wearisome road, that leads to it. They have suffered already, they think, nearly, if not quite, to the full extent of their patience: yet a great deal more suffering must come; and they shall never support it. But remember; thousands and millions, and amongst them, those of the quickest sensibility and

* Mic. ii. 10. † Matth. xxvi. 41. ‡ Heb. x. 7. § Ps. xxiii. 4.

most timorous dispositions, have borne before you as much as you can have to bear: nay, perhaps you have borne yourself much more, than remains behind. The same help from above, that enabled you to support yesterday, will enable you to support to-day and to-morrow. And in fact, we all of us bear things very well, which yet we call intolerable; and commonly go through severer and more tedious sufferings with as firm and calm a spirit, as we do lighter and shorter. At least therefore make not yourself miserable before-hand, by drawing frightful pictures of what may never come; or however may fall greatly short of what you imagine. And let the worst come; pray to God, and *look unto Jesus, who endured the cross;** then set yourself to bear what you can; and you will find that you can bear what you need. Pain, when moderate, is nothing terrible; and when acute, is seldom long. If you recover, you will soon forget all, or think and talk of it with pleasure: and if you die, that, to a good person, is the completest recovery, that is possible. In all events therefore be composed; and to assist yourself in it, avoid, with the utmost caution, all intemperate words and behaviour; for indulging them will only exasperate your mind; and checking them will quiet it very much. Yet never condemn yourself for merely natural expressions of what you feel; (for the most pious men, in Scripture, have used very strong ones) nor too rigidly for a little excess in them. A duty so hard, as undergoing sharp torments, or continued wearisomeness, may well admit of some imperfection in the performance, and yet entitle us, through our merciful Father's bounty, to a large recompence. Nor is it criminal in grievous agonies, tiresome confinement, lowness of spirits, or weakness of body, that make us burthens to ourselves

* Heb. xii. 2.

and others, humbly to ask, when no other hope of release appears, (if it be God's will) for that of death. Only we must do nothing to hasten it; we must use the means of preserving and supporting life so long as nature permits it to last: and we must not be impatient with heaven, if that be longer than we wish; but meekly suffer on, and faithfully maintain our post, until the appointed hour, when our great commander shall call us off to rest.

But besides resignation in sickness, we owe to God thankfulness also; for the numerous other blessings, which we still enjoy; for the blessing of health, all the time that we did enjoy it; for every interval and alleviation, every comfort and support, which he hath given us since: for we *are not worthy of the least of all his mercies**. Nor have we cause to be thankful under sickness only, but thankful for it also. Very possibly this may seem affectation to some, and *a hard saying*† to others. But consider: are we not often highly thankful, and with great cause, for what produces only pain to us at the time; as in the case of any rough medicine administered or painful operation performed upon us, necessity so requiring? Now God is the physician of our souls; and sickness is one of his principal methods of cure. By this he deadens our immoderate fondness for amusements and pleasures; and removes us out of the way of temptations to vanity and folly. By this he lowers the swelling vehemence of haughty spirits; and teaches hard hearts by experience, that misery deserves pity. By this he shews us the emptiness of the present world, the nearness and importance of the next: reminds us of self-inquiry and penitence, meditation and prayer; tries and exercises our faith, our trust, our patience:

* Gen. xxxii. 10. † John vi. 60.

gives us the opportunity of *offering to him what costs us something** ; and by employing us in more laborious work, secures to us a more ample reward. The harshest discipline, that is requisite to procure such benefits as these to us, (and it is only *if need be*†, that we are afflicted) surely deserves our utmost gratitude. The more, and more constantly, our hearts are filled with it ; the better and happier we shall be : but if we can arrive no farther, than to be sensible, that we have reason for thankfulness ; and to exert accordingly some acts of it from time to time upon recollection ; let it excite no terror in us, but only endeavours to improve. Nor should we imagine, that there is the least inconsistence between thankfulness for the good intended us by sickness, and earnest desires to feel as little of it, and be treated as gently, as our case will admit. God indeed knows, what inward strength we shall have : but we only know what our weakness is ; and ought therefore to pray, that if it be his good pleasure, our trial may be moderate.

But whatever it be, we must join our own care with his appointments : else all that we go through may be thrown away upon us ; and even in direct contradiction to his design, hurt us in the future life, as well as the present. This whole matter is beautifully described in the book of Job. If *they be bound in fetters, and holden in cords of affliction ; then he sheweth them their work, and their transgressions that they have exceeded. He openeth also their ear to discipline, and commandeth that they return from iniquity. If they obey and serve him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures. But the hypocrites* (or impure) *in heart heap up wrath : they cry not when he*

* 2 Sam. xxiv. 24. † 1 Pet. i. 6.

*bindeth them**. Let us therefore *humble ourselves under his hand*†, whenever he lays it upon us; consider the great end of all his corrections, and apply our whole souls to attain it. Perhaps we ought to have practised retirement and self-inspection during our health, and would not; but dissipated and lost ourselves in pursuits and cares, or diversions and trifles. To cure us of this, he confines us to a sick room, where we must be alone and think. Let us then at length do it to good purpose; look back to our conduct in this world, look forward to our portion in the next; *remember God on our bed, and meditate on him in the night-watches*‡. *Stand in awe, and sin no more; commune with your own heart in your chamber, and be still; offer the sacrifice of righteousness, and put your trust in the Lord*§.

For the better performance of these and all the duties of sickness, and obtaining such a conclusion of it, as may be most expedient for us, religious prudence will direct us to join with our own prayers those of our fellow-christians. To unite us more closely in good will and affection, our Saviour hath appointed, that our prayers shall be common; and hath declared, that *where we are gathered together* for this purpose, *he is in the midst of us*.‖ Accordingly, when St. Peter was in danger, *prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him*¶. And St. James's injunction concerning the sick is, *pray for one another that ye may be healed***. Nor certainly ought we to intercede less fervently for the souls of our brethren than their bodies. Therefore in the ancient liturgies, persons dangerously ill were

* Job xxxvi. 8, 9, 10, 11, 13. † 1 Pet. v. 6. ‡ Ps. lxiii. 6.
§ Ps. iv. 4. 5. John v. 14. ‖ Matth. xviii. 20. ¶ Acts xii. 5.
** James v. 16.

recommended by name to the throne of grace for such mercies as they needed. And our own hath provided on behalf of *those especially for whom our prayers are desired,* a most comprehensive request, for *comfort and relief according to their several necessities,* for *patience under their sufferings,* for *a happy issue out of all their afflictions.* And we shall consult both our duty and our interest, by intreating a particular share, when our case requires it, in the general supplications of the church of Christ.

But then if it pleases God to restore us, we must, as we have taken every method of procuring his mercy, take every method of acknowledging it. And one is, by suitable acts of devotion. Sincere and fervent thanksgivings at the time are indispensably necessary: and stated returns of them, for more remarkable deliverances, are very becoming and beneficial. But expressions of gratitude in words alone, however warm, are nothing. We must shew it in our whole behaviour; zealously keep alive the good purposes, that we formed in the time of our danger; freely own them; sacredly execute them; always remembering that the most perfect recovery is but a short reprieve: else our former sins, and more will *enter* into our souls, *and dwell there; and our last state be worse than our first**, like that of innumerable poor wretches, who are gone into eternity before us: whereas if we *pay our vows, which we promised with our lips, and spake with our mouths, when we were in trouble*† *; our chastening* shall *yield us* here *the peaceable fruit of righteousness*‡ *;* and *our light affliction, which is but for a moment, work for us an eternal weight of glory*§.

Thus I have gone through a large number of di-

* Matth. xii. 45. † Ps. lxvi. 12. ‡ Heb. xii. 11. § 2 Cor. iv. 17.

rections to the sick. But there is no small danger, that when you are called to the practice of them, some may be forgotten, some misapplied, and others found so short and imperfect, that perplexing difficulties how you are to act, or melancholy doubts what you are to think of your condition, may remain. Now in these cases it is natural to ask the opinion of serious and prudent friends. The more such you have, and the more good use you make of them, the better. But at least the ministers of the gospel are bound to be such to you, as far as they are able, whenever you apply to them. Not only the general nature of our office demands it; but we have all made a particular solemn promise, *to use both public and private monitions and exhortations, as well to the sick as to the whole, within our cures, as need shall require, and occasion shall be given**. Still we would obtrude ourselves on no one: but we must signify to you our readiness to perform this promise; and indeed our apprehensions, that you are often losers, by not claiming it. What we say to you here, passes with too many for words of course, to entertain you for the present half hour, and be thought of no more. At your own homes, when you are well, you expect to see us only on the same footing with other visitors: and when you are sick, you are unwilling to see us at all. Surely we might be of more service to you, if you would admit us; and particularly we might be so in your more considerable, especially in your more lasting illnesses; when for a long time together *you are shut up and cannot go into the house of the Lord*†. We hope you have no reason to fear, that we shall either artfully *make a gain of you*‡, or otherwise intermeddle in your worldly affairs; or indiscreetly augment your danger

* Office of ordaining priests. † Jer. xxxvi. 5. ‡ 2 Cor. xii. 17, 18.

by tiring or terrifying you. But if we can preserve you from either vainly terrifying, or fatally deceiving yourselves; can inform, or but remind you, of any part of your duty; or merely assist your patience, and enliven your hope: both you and we shall have cause to rejoice.

Doubtless not a few of you can think of every thing that is proper on such occasions, both in your own case and that of others, better than we can suggest it to you. And *would God, that all the Lord's people were prophets;** able to officiate thus to themselves, and those around them. But many are not: and such as are, would surely do well, at fitting times, were it only for example's sake, to observe St. James's rule, which he delivers in general terms: *Is any sick among you, let him call for the elders of the Church and let them pray over him:*† which prayers were doubtless preceded, or followed, by suitable exhortations. It is true, he directs them particularly in order to a miraculous cure of the sick; and prescribes at the same time, *anointing with oil in the name of the Lord,* which was used in performing such cures. We will not therefore say, that his injunction is exactly suited throughout to the present state of things. But still though *gifts of healing*‡ are ceased, and the ceremony belonging to them is become totally superfluous; it remains notwithstanding a Christian duty, *in every thing, by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, to let our requests be made known unto God:*§ and petitions for the sick, both public in the congregation, and private in their presence, may be of great efficacy, not only to their spiritual, but their bodily health. *For the fervent prayer of a*

* Numb. xi. 29. † James v. 14. ‡ 1 Cor. xii. 9, 28, 30.
§ Phil. iv. 6.

*righteous man availeth much.** Therefore in all ages the elders of the Church have attended them: and our own Church hath both given directions, and provided an office for that purpose.

Possibly one part of the office may seem to have ascribed so high a power to the minister, of absolving the sick from their sins, as may lead them into great mistakes. And it is indeed more liable to be so misunderstood than the earlier forms, which were expressed in the manner of a prayer. But still all writers on the subject have agreed, that this absolution either was intended (which indeed is most probable) only to set persons free from any ecclesiastical censures, which they might have incurred: (an indulgence, granted in every age of the Church to such as were dangerously ill, on their humble request; but which is no more pretended to make a change in their eternal state, than a pardon from the king is) or, if it means also to declare them restored to the favour of God, means it only on supposition of a sincere and thorough repentance; which being professed by them, it may be charitably presumed, though not certainly known, that it is real; and without which, I beg you all to observe, no absolution here, granted by whomsoever, or in what words soever, will do you the least good hereafter. Accordingly this form is not appointed ever to be used, but when the sick have made, by their own choice, *a special confession of some weighty matter, troubling their consciences, humbly and heartily desiring*, that it may be used for their consolation. And as this is but seldom requested, and consequently the absolution seldom pronounced over any one; so whenever it is, it may and ought to be

* James v. 16.

accompanied with such explanations, as will prevent any wrong constructions.

But there still remains to be mentioned, on this occasion, another act of piety, receiving the holy communion: which though not particularly appointed in Scripture for the sick, hath from the earliest times been recommended to them, and practised by them; as a very fit expression of their thankful faith in the merits of Christ's death; their hope of a future resurrection, as members of his body; and their being in charity with every other member of it, and all mankind: by the exercise of which graces in this manner, they obtain a title to such assistance from above for going happily through their present time of trial, as must needs be highly valuable to every serious mind.

But then, to enjoy the true benefit of the ordinances of Christ, and the prayers and exhortations of his ministers, you should desire them whilst you are capable of duly attending to them, and acting upon the impressions made by them; not defer them to the last, when they can hardly contribute any thing either to useful direction, or well-grounded comfort; and perhaps may only encourage an imagination, most pernicious to the souls of men, that a few formalities, in the conclusion of life, will atone for spending it ill. If we take refuge in religion with a bad heart unwillingly, it will be of no service to us: and if we really delight in its offices, we shall have recourse to them early; indeed we shall live in the observance of them always; only repeating them more frequently, and if possible, with more intense application of mind, as our need becomes more urgent. For thus our strength will increase with our burthen: and *when our flesh and our heart faileth, God shall be the strength of our heart, and our portion for ever.**

* Ps. lxxiii. 26.

SERMON XV.

ROM. xiv. 9.

FOR TO THIS END CHRIST BOTH DIED AND ROSE AND REVIVED, THAT HE MIGHT BE LORD BOTH OF THE DEAD AND LIVING.

THE public offices of our Church have led us, within a few months, through most of the principal transactions of our blessed Redeemer's life on earth. We have commemorated his condescension to take upon him *the likeness of sinful flesh,** his submitting to *fulfil* the *righteousness*† of the Jewish law, and his early manifestation to the Gentile world; his fasting forty days and nights, and yielding afterwards to be *tempted in all points as we are, yet without sin.*‡ Many of his wonderful works, many of his gracious instructions, have been rehearsed in our ears; and very lately his most bitter sufferings and death represented, as it were, before our eyes. We have accompanied him, from his sorrows and agonies in the garden, through all the sad variety of disgrace and pain that he underwent, till *he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost*§ on the cross. We have seen his dead body pierced to the heart with a spear, taken down and interred, the sepulchre closed, sealed up, and guarded; his disciples, though continuing to honour him, quite in despair about him: and yet we find him this day risen again, to die no more.

* Rom. viii. 3. † Matth. iii. 15.
‡ Heb. iv. 15. § John xix. 30.

Surely it is time we should ask ourselves what was the meaning of so unparalleled a transaction, to which the attention of all mankind hath been called so solemnly ever since? It could not be merely to move our compassion with a piteous history, that God sent his Son from Heaven, to live in wretchedness and die in torment; nor to fill us with a vain admiration, that he raised him from the grave, and hath placed him at his own right hand. What then was the view and use of this most extraordinary dispensation? the text informs us. *To this end Christ both died and rose and revived;* or, as it should be translated, and is elsewhere in the New Testament, *lives again, that he might be Lord both of the dead and the living.* Every thing he did or suffered was ordained to accomplish that merciful and awful scheme of Providence, our Saviour's universal dominion over all; to make the obedient good and happy, and reward the disobedient according to their works. This important doctrine I shall

I. Explain and prove. Then shew,

II. Under what obligations it lays us.

I. Christ indeed, as the eternal Son of the Father, had original glory and dominion before the world existed; *was in the beginning with God, and was God.** But the Apostle speaks not here of that dignity and power which his divine nature always possessed, but which his human nature acquired, by dying and rising and living again. It is true, the former part of his life contributed greatly, both by his doctrine and example, to set up that kingdom of righteousness, over which he was to reign. And even then *the Father had given all things into his hand,*† *and committed all judgment to him.*‡ But this being done

* John i. 1. † John iii. 35. ‡ John v. 22.

in consideration of his future sufferings, on them the foundation of his authority is laid in Scripture. Thus St. Paul teaches, that, because *being in the form of God, he was willing to take upon him the form of a servant,* an inferior and ministering nature, as ours is; and then, being *found in fashion as a man, humbled himself* yet lower *unto the death of the cross: therefore God hath highly exalted him, and given him a name above every name.** But elsewhere he more determinately grounds his sovereignty on his passion alone; *We see Jesus, for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour.*† And justly doth it intitle him to an authority over us, since it gained him a property in us. For sin both subjecting men by its guilt, as debtors and criminals, to the just sentence of God, and by its dominion, as captives and slaves, to the unjust empire of the devil; our Saviour, by delivering us in each of these respects, hath obtained a double right to us. By giving his life a ransom to divine justice, he hath bought us to himself with the price of his blood; so that we are his in right of purchase. And having destroyed the tyranny of the wicked one over us, by the holiness of the precepts which his death confirmed, and the efficacy of the grace which it procured, we are his again in right of conquest.

This authority, thus acquired, his resurrection openly proclaimed; attesting, not only in general the truth of his mission, but in particular the acceptance of his sufferings for our redemption: and consequently his title to govern us, and his power to raise us up again according to his promise, as he had raised himself. Hence, during the remainder of his continuance on earth, he founded and gave laws to his church; and

* Phil. ii. 6—9. † Heb. ii. 9.

being yet more solemnly invested with fulness of power on his ascension to Heaven, he ever lives to rule and protect it. Nor doth his sovereignty extend over mankind alone, but the whole creation. For *God*, as St. Paul assures us, *having raised him from the dead, hath set him at his own right hand, far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come, and hath put all things under his feet:** *that in the name of Jesus*, as he adds in another place, *every knee should bow, of things in Heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; and every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord.*† In these words he is described, both as the high priest and the king of the universe. His possession of the former office is expressed by saying, that *every knee shall bow in his name;* for so it should be translated, not *at his name*, when his name is mentioned: though that be a practice, both unexceptionable and reverent. *To bow the knee* is to pray. So, Eph. iii. 14. *For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, that he would grant you to be strengthened by his spirit in the inner man.* Therefore to *bow the knee in the name of Jesus*, is to pray in his name, as the person qualified and appointed to present our petitions to God, and derive his blessings upon us. The remaining part of the passage declares his kingly office: *And every tongue confess, that Jesus Christ is Lord;* or, as St. John more emphatically stiles him, *Lord of Lords, and King of Kings.*‡ Nor are men only, but *all the angels* of God required to *worship him*§ as such. Created beings, of how exalted rank

* Eph. i. 20, 21, 22.
† Phil. ii. 10, 11.
‡ Rev. xvii. 14.
§ Heb. i. 6.

soever, can only be *faithful as servants in the house of God, but Christ as a son over his house, which himself hath builded**.

In what manner he governs the rest of his works we are not concerned to inquire. Men he governs, by giving laws, which every one, who receives the knowledge of them, is bound to obey, and no one may add to, diminish, or alter; by forming those, who submit to him willingly, into a regular society, or universal church, provided with fit means of instruction, discipline, and grace; by improving them in all goodness, and strengthening them against all temptation; by providing, that in the worst of times *the gates of hell shall not prevail*† to abolish true religion; and gradually bringing on, according to his promise, that happy age, when *the kingdoms of this world shall become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ, and he shall take to himself his great power and shall reign*‡. But however illustrious his dominion may then appear, the full manifestation of it, (for which every other act of his regal authority is opening the way) will be in that hour, when he shall *come with the holy angels to sit upon the throne of his glory, and all nations being gathered before him*§, shall sentence the wicked, both men and devils, to everlasting punishment, but bestow on the righteous life eternal. After which, the ends of this whole dispensation being now accomplished, he *shall deliver up his kingdom* of grace *to God even the Father*‖, in whose kingdom of glory he *shall* still *reign*, with him and the Holy Spirit, over his saints and angels *for ever and ever*¶.

* Heb. iii. 3, 5, 6. † Matth. xvi. 18. ‡ Rev. xi. 15, 17.
§ Matth. xvi. 27.—xix. 28.—xxv. 31, 32. ‖ 1 Cor. xv. 24.
¶ Rev. xi. 15.

Such is the sovereignty over all, which the Son of Man, first died to acquire; and then rising again lives to exercise. And as it extends through the whole creation of God, from the beginning to the consummation of all things, no wonder if the reasons and circumstances of many particulars in it be incomprehensible to us. Notwithstanding these, as the main of it appears highly worthy of God, and no part evidently unworthy, we ought to believe the whole, on the strong and manifold attestations which he hath given us of its truth. The *preaching of Christ crucified* may seem *foolishness** to the wise in their own imaginations. But whoever is duly sensible of his being in a state, where we *know but in part, and see* what is nearest to us *through a glass darkly*†, will be glad to receive, with implicit faith, that *wisdom of God in a mystery, which he hath ordained before the world unto our glory*‡.

The foundation of the Christian scheme, that we are all originally prone to sin, and actually guilty of it, is but too notorious. Now the mercy of our heavenly Father, though constantly shewn in a proper degree to every proper object, preserves not the faulty from daily experiencing dreadful consequences of their faults in this life, which the sincerest repentance will not singly prevent. And who can disprove what the New Testament affirms, and throughout implies, that we should all have experienced yet worse consequences in the life to come, had not our blessed Redeemer done and suffered for us the things he hath? In general, that one person may, by interposing, and even bearing much, on behalf of others, avert from them great evils, and procure them great good, we are very sensible. And supposing us ever so ig-

* 1 Cor. i. 23. † 1 Cor. xiii. 12. ‡ 1 Cor. ii. 7.

norant what connexion in particular there is between the sufferings of Christ and our own salvation; we have no more cause to complain, than that we cannot learn, by what steps a friend hath delivered us from worldly danger, or by what efficacy a medicine hath restored our health. All that we are concerned in, all that we are to believe and do, we are plainly told. And if we are not told, what God alone is concerned in, the reasons of his own counsels; we may well be content, that by this method we are brought to eternal felicity, without asking, why rather by this, than any other.

Yet even to that inquiry some answer may be returned. The poverty and labour, the injuries and provocations, the sorrows and pains, which our Saviour went through with so perfect and constant a greatness and goodness of mind, afford the strongest confirmations of our faith in his doctrine, and most powerful incitements to practise the very hardest of his precepts. That we are not forgiven, but on the condition of his undergoing these things, proves, that God hath an irreconcileable abhorrence of sin, and a high regard to the honour of his government: while yet his providing for the performance of this condition proves equally that he hath the tenderest compassion for his fallen and helpless creatures.

Other footsteps of wisdom in this wonderful transaction, an humble search may undoubtedly trace. But whether many more, and yet weightier motives to it, may not still remain behind, which perhaps it is impossible, perhaps unfit, for us to see at present, we cannot know, for we are not told. Who would venture to say of the most familiar object of sense before him, that its only uses are those which he is able to discover? And surely we ought not to have less mo-

desty in points, that are so much farther beyond our reach. We believe, on the credit of men like ourselves, many things to have influences, that we neither have experienced them to have, nor discern by reason that they must have. Why then is not God to be trusted, as well as our fellow-creatures? And since in the affairs of this world, we often walk *not by sight but by faith** ; what objection can there be against it in those of another? Especially considering, that we are only a small portion of a whole, the rest of which is almost intirely hid from us: and cannot even conjecture, what dependences there may be of one part on the other; and much less, what those dependences may require.

It plainly appears, that men are by no means the only beings interested in our blessed Lord. The Scripture teaches, that, as by *him and for him were created all things that are in heaven and are in earth, visible and invisible, and by him all things consist:* so *by him also was God pleased, having made peace through the blood of his cross, to reconcile all things to himself, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven†: that in the dispensation of the fulness of times, he might gather together in one all things in Christ; both which are in heaven and which are on earth, even in him‡.* Such hints, as these, of a scheme of Providence amazingly extensive, were not given, either to gratify or excite our curiosity; but to admonish us, that, in the religious administration of the universe, there are particulars, not designed to be comprehended by us at present, but by some other part of the creation; things done *to the intent,* (as the Apostle elsewhere more explicitly informs us) *that now unto the principalities and*

* 2 Cor. v. 7. † Col. i. 16, 20. ‡ Eph. i. 10.

*powers in heavenly places might be made known, by the church, the manifold wisdom of God, according to the Eternal purpose, which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord**. Well then may it become us to be modest in judging of a plan so much too great for us; and to reverence, without expecting to search out fully, that *mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ, wherein,* we are expressly told, *are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*† I proceed therefore now,

II. To shew under what obligations this dominion of our Saviour lays us. And these are, first to acknowledge, secondly to obey it.

If the original relation we bear to our Creator is to be owned and respected; the next we stand in, to our Redeemer, is as justly entitled to our regard. That one is taught by nature, the other by revelation only, makes no difference. Being equally real, they are equally grounds of duty: and neglect of either is alike profane. God, the great Ruler of the world, may both administer the whole of it in such a form as he thinks fit; and vary the regulations of each part, as varying circumstances require. There can possibly be no more room to doubt, whether under the general laws of his moral kingdom he may form, from time to time, particular institutions of religion; than whether, under the general laws of human society, may be formed particular institutions of government. Suppose then a person were to advance, concerning the latter, what some bold writers have done concerning the former; were to profess an entire submission

* Eph. iii. 10, 11. "We know not what need there was to set up a head and chieftain, in opposition to *the Prince of this world; the Prince of the power of the air*, &c. whereof there are more than obscure intimations in Scripture." Locke's Reasonableness of Christianity, p. 530. Vol. II. of his Works. † Col. ii. 2, 3.

to the mutual obligations of rational beings at large, but an utter contempt of the peculiar statutes of the community, in which he lived: should declare that the commands of the civil power were only a republication of the law of nature; that this being absolutely perfect, nothing could be added to it, nothing prescribed, which was not obligatory before such prescription; and that therefore all injunctions and determinations, by national authority, of what common reason had not enjoined and determined, were arbitrary, tyrannical and unjust; that public wisdom, being always the same, must always direct the same things; and therefore different orders could never have force in different ages or provinces: would not these notions be extremely absurd? And surely they are no less absurd in religion than social life. If men may form themselves with good cause into particular civil establishments, God may form them with better cause into particular religious establishments, such as that of Christianity. If our earthly superiors may discern sufficient ground, as the condition and behaviour of their subjects alter, to put all, or any part of them, under new regulations, or grant them new privileges: much more may *our Father, which is in Heaven,** do so with us. If we are bound often to obey the appointments of human prudence without knowing the motives of those appointments: well may Omniscience claim the most unlimited compliance. And if, lastly, a dutiful attachment to the constitution of our country be part of a worthy character; and wilful violation of it, disloyalty to the state: surely the heartiest zeal for the ordinances of our better country is a still more essential part; and deliberate contempt of them, rebellion against God: a dreadful crime always, but

* Matth. vii. 11.

singularly heinous and fatal in the present case; because these ordinances are calculated throughout solely for our good, temporal and spiritual, present and future; and nothing else can secure us the same advantages. The Gospel, besides comprehending, and expressing more clearly, the whole of natural religion, superadds also, such assurance of pardon, such means of grace, and such glorious promises of eternal bliss to body and soul; that little do they consider their own interest, who would rest their case, if they could, on the mere conjectures of unassisted reason: which, though sufficient to render the condition of those tolerable, who have no other guide; yet must be owned, in comparison, to leave sinners much room for fear, and afford but small foundation for lasting hope. Indeed, with these new advantages, Christianity brings in some new precepts also: but none of them burthensome; and all of them conducive to our happiness, here and hereafter; provided we not only acknowledge the dominion we are under, but, which is the second and last point, obey it.

There are few who totally reject religion: but few also, who receive it thoroughly and effectually. Some trusting to the notional belief and formal practice of merely revealed truths and duties, allow themselves to despise, and occasionally to neglect moral obligations. This was the great error of the Jews in our Saviour's days: as in truth it hath been of Christians in general ever since: and there cannot be a more pernicious one. But of late, especially in this nation, great numbers have fallen into the opposite error. Professing the highest value for morals, they have little or none for piety. Even that which nature dictates, they hardly shew any real concern for: and as absolute a contempt of the doctrines and appointments of

Scripture, though it may be all the while they think they believe in Scripture, as they could do, if they denied it. Now very seldom will either the practice, or even the notions of morality, in such persons, be near so perfect as they should be. For disregard to God or to any of his commands, will soon bring on a farther disregard, both of right behaviour towards our fellow-creatures, and right government of ourselves: till acknowledging virtue to be his law, we shall acknowledge nothing as virtue but what we like; leave out all uneasy restraints, put in all agreeable indulgences; and so have an excellent rule of life in pretence, perhaps in imagination, but in reality none at all. Or supposing this to be otherwise: yet the duties we owe to him who hath made us by the word of his power, to him who hath redeemed us from guilt and misery by his blood, to him who is ready to purify us by his perpetual influences, must be the principal ties we are under: and did the conscientious observance of them contribute ever so little, (though indeed it contributes more than any thing) to the good order of this world; still it is indispensably necessary to a purpose of far greater moment, preparing our hearts for the employment and happiness of the world to come. We strangely mistake our case, if we measure every thing, as we are apt to do, merely by its influence on the present life. This whole scene of things is a state of education and discipline only: we are forming and training up, by the laws of our Saviour's kingdom here, to such a temper and spirit, as may render us for ever blessed in it hereafter. No wonder, if now, in our condition of infancy, we see not the reason and use of every step taken with us. Being sure we are in kind and good hands, our duty and our wisdom is to give up ourselves entirely to

God's disposal. For we know not what we do, when we presume to slight any part of what he hath prescribed: only this we know, that *offending in one point,* is both in reasonable construction and in probable consequence, being *guilty of all.**

Religion, though ever in substance the same, hath been proposed to mankind in different shapes, as the reason of things in different ages required. Under whichsoever of these dispensations we had lived, our business had been, humbly to conform ourselves to it, and carefully to improve ourselves by it, *walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord, blameless.*† But as we are happily reserved to the fullest and clearest, the most rational and amiable exhibition of faith and duty that the world ever saw or will see; we are surely bound to embrace it with peculiar joy; to obey from the heart every injunction of so gracious a Master, as our blessed Redeemer; and which is the end of all, make such a progress in real inward devotion, benevolence, purity and humility, as will bear a due proportion to the advantages that we enjoy. For it cannot be, that after those demonstrations of love, and those means of improvement, which God hath given us in his Gospel, he should only expect us to be as good as heathens: and yet are we not often worse? But in vain do we call ourselves Christians, if names and forms be the whole of our Christianity: In vain do we call the holy Jesus Lord, unless, by doing such things as he commands, we become such as he was. To this therefore, if we have any sense of gratitude, the love of our Saviour must constrain us: to this, if we have any concern for happiness, the fear of our Judge must compel us. For, as the Apos-

* James ii. 10. † Luke i. 6.

tle, just before the text, hath most truly observed, *none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself: for whether we live, we live unto the Lord; or whether we die, we die unto the Lord.** In both states we are absolutely his property, and entirely at his disposal. If we obey him, *we shall also reign with him*: *if we deny him, he will also deny us.*† Let us therefore always bear in mind his own awful words: *I am he, that liveth, and was dead; and behold I am alive for evermore, Amen: and have the keys of death and of hell.*‡

* Rom. xiv. 7, 8. † 2 Tim. ii. 12. ‡ Rev. i. 18.

SERMON XVI.

ACTS x. 40, 41.

HIM GOD RAISED UP THE THIRD DAY, AND SHEWED HIM OPENLY. NOT TO ALL THE PEOPLE, BUT UNTO WITNESSES CHOSEN BEFORE OF GOD, EVEN TO US WHO DID EAT AND DRINK WITH HIM AFTER HE ROSE FROM THE DEAD.

THE Resurrection of our blessed Lord being the principal fact, on which he himself put the proof of his divine authority; and being that fact in particular, of which he especially appointed his Apostles to be witnesses to mankind; it concerns the Christian cause very nearly, that the evidence of this point should be undeniable. And accordingly it is obviously plain, that no impostor would ever have appealed to a method of trying his pretensions, that required his being put to death before it could decide any thing: and that no enthusiast would ever have conducted himself in so calm and prudent a manner, and taught so rational a doctrine, as our Saviour did. It is equally plain, that his followers could never be deceived, and imagine their master alive again when he was not. They could not be deceived by their hopes and expectations; for they own, they despaired of it. They could not be deceived for want of opportunities to find out the truth: for they declare, that he appeared a great number of times, to several of them singly, to all of them

assembled, once to the number of five hundred, by day as well as by night, in very different and distant places, sometimes unexpectedly, sometimes by appointment: that they not only saw, but touched and handled him; that he walked and conversed, and eat and drank with them; that he gave them these evidences for no less than forty days together; and then was visibly taken up into the clouds, before their eyes. If now it be possible for so many persons to be mistaken in all this, it is impossible for any one to be rationally sure of any thing.

It may also be shewn further, that as they were not deceived themselves, so neither did they intend to deceive others in this matter. There is no manner of reason to suspect, that they would have done it, if they could. For supposing them to think he came from God; they might well conclude that God would take care of his own cause, and did not need their turning cheats to serve it. And supposing they now at last thought him a seducer; what could there be, either honester, or wiser, or more likely, for them to do, than to confess their mistake; with due indignation at his having imposed on them so long, and drawn them into such great inconveniencies and dangers? But even if they had been desirous to set up an imposture: they had evidently neither skill to contrive, nor courage to attempt, nor power to execute it. They were comparatively but a handful of men in all: and they had very lately had full experience, that they could neither trust one another, nor themselves: for one of them had betrayed his master; the most zealous man amongst them had denied him, and all the rest had forsaken him. The whole weight of authority, Jewish and Roman, was against them,

careful to watch them, and (as they saw by the example before their eyes) determined not to spare them, if they went on. Then as for the people; they had never opposed the magistrates in any part of this affair; they had furiously joined with them in the last part; and there was not the least likelihood now, of their undertaking the defence of a few unknown and mean men; who taught a system of doctrine very unwelcome to their zealous spirits; and built it on a strange fact, utterly contradictory to their settled opinions. For as they had no notion, that the Messiah was to be put to death: they could have none of his rising again. Surely, in these circumstances, if his disciples had acted on worldly motives, their point must have been to provide for their own safety by flight and silence: and thus, for ought that appears, they might have been very safe. But if they resolved to pretend a resurrection; their very first step must be to get the body into their power, that it might not be produced against them: and in this, guarded as it was, they must either have perished, or at least have failed. Or had they succeeded; it must have been notorious, by what means they had succeeded; and the chief Priests would have been able to give the world some better account of the matter, than that absurd one of the soldiers, affirming, (what they could not know; and durst not have owned, if it had been true) that, while they slept, his followers came, and stole him away. Or could they possibly have gone thus far undiscovered: still, what prospect had they before them, by carrying on the same scheme, which their Lord had done, but to be persecuted and put to death, as he had been? They were persecuted accordingly: some of them put to death soon; the rest, after they had been

harrassed many years: yet all persisted in their testimony to the end of their lives. Now men will too commonly renounce what they know to be true, rather than suffer for it: but by no means chuse to suffer, in this manner, for what they know to be false. Or however unaccountably obstinate one or two may, by great chance, happen to be, numbers will not be so; especially at times, and places, remote from each other. And it must be further observed, that not only these persons continued uniform and unmoveable in their testimony, but they none of them ever disgraced it, by any sort of vicious or interested behaviour. And, though nothing, but love of truth, could induce men to join with them; and there was every possible motive besides, against it; yet multitudes of all ranks in all nations did join with them, did suffer with them, did attest their performing the same miracles with their Master, and enabling others to perform them; and thus they went on, till, with no other weapons, they and their successors conquered the world.

All these things have been frequently and fully proved; few of them denied, no solid reason alledged for denying any of them: only small cavils and difficulties have been raised, here and there: amongst which, one that appears perhaps the most considerable, is grounded on what St. Peter mentions in the text of his own accord, that our Saviour after his resurrection appeared, *not to all the people, but to witnesses, chosen before of God.* Upon this it hath been argued, that selecting only a few persons, and all those out of his own party, to be his witnesses, instead of permitting every one to see him that would, was a very suspicious method: that he ought to have shewn himself to all the people, for they were all concerned in the matter; at least to all the rulers:

for, if he had convinced them; the testimony of persons, who had been so much his enemies, and were of such weight and credit, would have satisfied the whole nation, and of consequence the whole world. This objection which may possibly sometimes perplex believers, as well as afford a handle for profane talk to unbelievers, I shall make it my present business to answer.

And, in the first place, it misrepresents the fact. There is neither the least proof, nor the least probability, that any one, who desired to see our Saviour after his resurrection, was refused it. The Apostles were chosen, not to be the only persons, that should see him; far from it: but to be the chief persons, that should go through the world, to testify they had seen him; and to instruct and superintend those, who should believe on him. They were of his party indeed. But what could make them so? nothing, but his doctrine and miracles first: and his resurrection afterwards. For, though even whilst he lay dead, they honoured him; yet their faith in him, as the Messiah, was almost dead too, till they saw him alive again. If ever so many more had seen him, and been convinced by it; must not they have become of his party also? and would that have destroyed their evidence? If it would, he could not possibly have any evidence, though he had appeared and convinced the rulers and the whole city. And if it would not, why were not the Apostles, and other first Christians, good evidence? For aught we know, many of the five hundred, to whom he appeared at once, might be convinced by that appearance, and not before. But however that be, if an attestation of five hundred persons, or a much less number to any fact, be not enough, no number can be. For if so many can,

every one of them, either be deceived, or combine to deceive others; ever so many more may also: and then there is an end of human testimony. Therefore, in all cases, a competent quantity of witnesses to any action or writing, is deemed sufficient; and procuring as many as could possibly be got, is never required. This indeed was a case of a very extraordinary nature. And I hope you have seen, there was proof of it, to a very extraordinary degree: such proof, that, had this one circumstance, of our Saviour's not appearing to all the people, been ever so unaccountable; nay, had there been many other strange ones besides; the direct positive evidence would have greatly outweighed whatever suspicions could be raised from them, with any pretence of reason: and to more than suspicions they could not amount.

God indeed could have given, no doubt, yet stronger proof, than we have. But is he obliged to give on all occasions, or any, the strongest he can? Doth he give us such, in the most important affairs of common life? Doth he give us such, of his own existence? And are we for want of it, neither to believe any thing, nor act any way, in respect of this world or another? Can God be bound to gratify the fancifulness, the indolence, the obstinacy of his creatures, so as to afford them still more and more evidence, the more inconsiderate and perverse they are? Or are not we bound humbly to seek, thankfully to receive, and carefully to use, what he doth afford us? We may think indeed, that it had been greater goodness to afford us further proofs yet: and so we may think it would, for God to have done a multitude of other things, which yet he hath not done: for instance, to have made us happy, without putting us to any trial of our behaviour: yet this world

is plainly a state of trial, in which our present and future good, or evil, depends on our conduct. And why may not our fairness in receiving evidence be one thing tried, as well as our obedience, in acting suitably to it, another? Now the highest possible degree of evidence, leaves no room almost for this trial. And therefore what our Saviour said to St. Thomas, was perfectly just: *Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they, that have not seen, and yet have believed.** That situation gives an opportunity for honest and candid minds, to shew themselves such, and be rewarded for it. And if it doth lead captious and unfair ones to shew themselves too, and be punished; how have they deserved better?

But particularly, how had the Jews deserved more, or so much, proof of our Saviour's mission, as he had, before his resurrection, vouchsafed them? They had seen innumerable miracles of various kinds, performed by him: they had seen several miracles of this very kind. Still, they had not only refused to acknowledge him, but deliberately rejected, condemned, and put him to death. Where then was their claim to further favours? If he had forbidden his Apostles to mention his resurrection to them; and directed them to preach the Gospel only to the Gentiles; had it been unjust? But instead of this, he gave them, notwithstanding, the first knowledge of it, with the same evidence for it, that he gave the rest of mankind. And he had plainly foretold, that he would give them no more: that his disciples should see him after his death, and they should not.† For indeed his commission, so far as it related peculiarly to instructing them, was now at an end. The believing Jews were to make part of his church, in common with the Gen-

* John xx. 29 † Matth. xxiii. 39. John xiv. 19.

tiles. The unbelieving ones he had no further especial concern with, than to inflict on them, unless they repented, that punishment, which God had decreed. And on what foundation, after this, could they be intitled to his appearing amongst them? Every nation, every person upon earth, ever since, hath had, and still hath, full as good a title, and a better, to expect his appearing to them also. For if it were necessary, in order to give the Jews sufficient evidence: it is necessary, in order to give it us. And if they might reasonably hope for it as matter of favour, why not we likewise, who live so long after, and, I hope, have not deserved quite so ill?

This objection therefore proves a great deal too much, and for that reason proves nothing; even supposing, that our Saviour's public appearance, after his death, would have had such happy effects, as some have pretended. But indeed the consequences of this, which God alone can know perfectly, (and therefore it might become us to acquiesce in his judgment) have certainly been considered very imperfectly by these objectors. For if our blessed Lord had appeared, either to all the people, or to all the rulers of the people, what is it likely would have followed?

If to all the people: many of them, to be sure, had never seen him before his resurrection: and therefore could have no conviction of it from seeing him after. Many had seen him but transiently in a crowd: some only when he was disfigured with ill usage, and stooping under his cross: probably not a few had mistaken for him the person, that carried it part of the way in his stead. Even when he was fixed upon it, and lifted up; distance would hinder some, and the change of his features, by agonies and death, would hinder others, from knowing him again with any certainty.

Just as in the case of the blind man; one part would have said, *It is he;* another, *he is like him:** but a third perhaps quite the contrary. Every one would have spoken, as their fancy or prejudices led them: his enemies would have magnified and triumphed in the difference of persuasions; and no certain judgment could ever have been formed, unless the many, who knew but little of him, had submitted their opinions to the few, in comparison, that knew him well: which possibly they would not. But if they had, this would have amounted to very little more, than believing the testimony of others, without seeing him themselves at all. And whether the number, then present at Jerusalem, of such as were personally acquainted with him, might be greater, or less, than the five hundred, whom he appeared to at once, we cannot know. But were it much greater; still suppose only, what is very supposable, that some of these had been induced, either then or afterwards, by promises, or threatenings, or punishments, to deny it was he; what perplexities must that have raised? And how much wiser was the method, which God took, of shewing him, to such alone, as knew him thoroughly, and he foresaw would testify their knowledge with uprightness and constancy!

If then, to avoid this endless contradiction, he had appeared to the chief priests and elders only: still, several of them, in all likelihood, either knew him not, or but imperfectly. And had they all known him ever so well: it is far from certain, that, on seeing him, they would have believed in him, after what they had seen, without believing in him. Amongst other things they several of them saw Lazarus rise, and more had opportunities of conversing with him after he was

* John ix. 9.

risen. Yet they did not believe in Jesus for that. They might have ascribed this miracle, as well as others, to Beelzebub: or, as their successors, down to this day, absurdly ascribe all of them, to pretended magic arts. They must indeed have been convinced, that, by some means or other, he was risen: but that would have made them no witnesses for him. It appears by their whole conduct that they were convinced of it, without seeing him. Not only their bribing the soldiers; but their leaving his disciples unmolested at first; their bearing so quietly all their boldness of speech for some time afterwards; their suffering Gamaliel to express his doubts, whether this matter were not of God; their following in part his advice, to let them alone, which was founded on those doubts; instead of prosecuting them to the utmost, as impostors: in short their whole history, in the beginning of the Acts; and particularly several things in it, which St. Luke doth not seem once to have thought of applying to this purpose, evidently shew, that the Jewish rulers well knew, a strict inquiry would not serve their turn; and therefore tried, as long as they could, to stifle and conceal what had happened, in hopes it would gradually be forgotten. Undoubtedly their wiser way had been, to have owned the truth, and yielded to it. But they were too wicked to be wise: and so contrived only to be cunning. Our Saviour had declared in strong terms against them: they had proceeded to the last extremities against him. Therefore, besides their speculative prejudices; if he prevailed, all their authority, they saw, was utterly gone; and their persons, they probably imagined, were not safe. So that, hardened as they were, and persuaded it was too late to retreat; laying new evidence before them would only have increased their guilt in resisting it: they

would have believed nothing they could help, they would have acknowledged nothing at all; but, if need had required, averred the direct contrary to what their own eyes had beheld. Probably indeed they were not all profligate alike: some of them would have submitted to our Saviour, if they had seen him: but how do we know, that the same persons did not, upon the testimony of others seeing him? For they, whom any proof would convince, might very well be convinced by such proof, as that was: and we are expressly told, that a *great company of the priests were obedient to the faith*:* whose conviction, and that of thousands more, at Jerusalem itself, so very soon after, against their former deep-rooted persuasion, and present interest, is a strong confirmation of the fact asserted by those, who were witnesses: and, on the whole, may be full as satisfactory, as if they had been witnesses themselves.

But supposing that our Saviour's appearance to them would have converted all the rulers: undoubtedly this would have had a great, perhaps a general effect, in that one nation. But every nation, and every succeeding age, was concerned equally in this matter: and what effect would it have had upon them? The Romans first would have considered it as a Jewish fraud, concerted amongst themselves, to raise the credit of their own religion; and no more have regarded the miracles of the Apostles amongst their countrymen, in these circumstances, than we do those of the Church of Rome, pretended to be wrought, where every one is either unwilling, or afraid, to detect them. The infidels of later days, who believe nothing of the other miracles which the Jews believe, would they have believed this, merely because the Jews believed it?

* Acts vi. 7.

Since they cannot even now refrain from ascribing our religion to policy and priestcraft, though all the Jewish politicians and priests were zealous against it to the utmost; what would they have said, if both had been for it, on seeing Christ after his resurrection? Undoubtedly, that they had feigned a difficulty of being brought over into what they had, in truth, originally contrived; and, by their art and authority, prevented the discoveries, that else might have been made; or hushed up those, that actually were made.

Nor would even this have been the worst consequence yet. Had both the rulers, and the people received him as the Messiah, on the evidence of his appearing a second time alive: still they would have received him, according to their own false notion of the Messiah, as a temporal prince; and been immediately up in arms to set him on the throne, whether he would or not. For when he had performed but one miracle that took with them: he found they were resolved instantly to *make him king by force*;* and he avoided it only by escaping from them. He might indeed, when he was risen again, have plainly told them all their mistake: but they would either have rejected him once more upon it; (and then, to what purpose had they seen him?) or they would have thought he meant something different from what he seemed to say; as the disciples did, when he very plainly foretold his own death. Even them he could never set thoroughly right in the article of his kingdom, so long as he remained on earth: much less the people. They were uneasy under their new masters: they expected a deliverer: their expectations were just then at the height: and had he shewn himself amongst them, and been acknowledged by them; what could have restrained

* John vi. 15.

them, but such a power, as God never exercises over the wills of men; for it would destroy their freedom, and alter the whole constitution of the moral world? Therefore, instead of *appearing to all the people*, he did not let his disciples preach him to any of the people, from his resurrection till after his ascension: for had the body of them been told, and believed, that the Messiah was risen, and still amongst them; of course they would have been eager in seeking him; and what rumours and tumults would this have raised, and what must have been the consequences? After this, if he had left them, and ascended into Heaven, the remedy had come too late: the ferment would have continued; and it is impossible to know, to what height it might have risen.

But had the Jews been ever so quiet; ever so much convinced by our Saviour, that they ought to remain quiet: yet, when once the Romans, who must know their former notions of the Messiah, came to understand, that they all agreed that he was at last come; they would never have believed this calm to be any thing but an artifice, to lull them asleep, till matters were ripe for a general insurrection. They would therefore have seized on the leading men immediately, called in their forces from the countries round, and required the whole nation to renounce their new king. Had they submitted to this, there had been an end of Christianity amongst them. Had they resisted, as in all probability they would: upon the Romans prevailing, what the chief priests apprehended had certainly come to pass; they would have *taken away their place and nation*,* and the whole would have been charged on the doctrine of Christ. If the Jews had prevailed; they would have imagined their suc-

* John xi. 48.

cess a full proof, that the Messiah was yet virtually, though not corporally, amongst them; and proceeded to extend his dominion as wide as they could: under which circumstances, the Gospel, in a manner absolutely contrary to its nature and genius, must have owed its progress, if it made any, to force, not persuasion; and so have been liable to the same unanswerable objection, that the religion of Mahomet is now.

Or lastly, supposing what is in the highest degree unlikely, that neither the Jews had rebelled, nor the Romans suspected them, but both had been made such as they ought, by a public appearance of our Saviour after his resurrection: undoubtedly this had been very happy for that age, and perhaps the next or two: but what had been the case of distant ages? We, that live in the latter days, should, by these means, have lost entirely all that strong and necessary evidence, for the truth of his miracles and history, which arises now from the impossibility of his primitive disciples having any motive to deceive men, in teaching a doctrine, for which they suffered, so patiently and cheerfully, persecution and death. Christianity would then, in all likelihood, have been considered as a superstructure of Roman policy, erected by an artful emperor, on a piece of Jewish enthusiasm, which he found very commodious for bringing the world into good order; particularly into quiet subjection to its new master. And the meekness of spirit, which our religion enjoins, and the great stress it lays on obedience to the civil magistrate, would have been thought a demonstration, that this, and nothing else, was the real truth. So that the whole would have seemed by this method a contrivance of man: whereas now it appears plainly the work of God; affording reasona-

ble evidence to good minds; preventing the harm, that must have followed, if bad ones, continuing such, had joined with them; and turning that opposition, both of Jews and Heathens, which threatened the ruin of the Gospel, into a proof of its truth, that will support it for ever.

These considerations are surely sufficient to remove any doubts of serious and humble minds on this head: to convince objectors, that they do not always see to the bottom of what they venture to talk about very freely: and to make it probable, that, in other points, as well as the present, when they come to be thoroughly examined, *the foolishness of God* will always be found *wiser than men*:* which good purposes may surely justify dwelling, now and then, somewhat largely on a subject of less general and practical use. It is true, the bad consequences, that might have attended our Saviour's public appearance after his death, are several of them only conjectural: but the good ones, imagined likely to flow from it, are so too: and stronger conjectures are very justly opposed to weaker. Nay were any, or ever so many, of the reasons alledged for his conduct in this respect, of no weight at all: yet who knows, what others there may still remain in the endless treasures of the divine wisdom, to be discovered hereafter? And what hath so fallible and short sighted a creature as man, to do; but thankfully to receive whatever knowledge, be it more or less perfect, his Maker shall vouchsafe to give him; and apply himself with the utmost care, to act suitably to what he understands; instead of raising objections and cavils, out of every particular, that he is ignorant of? *For the secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things, which are revealed,*

* 1 Cor. i. 25.

*belong unto us, and to our children for ever; that we may do all the words of the law.**

Let us all therefore learn, not only to believe firmly in speculation, that our Saviour is risen again; but in the faith of his resurrection to prepare for our own: earnestly praying God, *to raise us from the death of sin to the life of righteousness; and diligently seeking those things which are above, where Christ sitteth at the right hand of God; that when he shall appear we also may appear with him in glory.*† After his crucifixion he appeared on earth only to a few: but the day is approaching, when, *behold, he cometh with clouds, and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him: and all kindreds of the earth,* that rejected or disobeyed him, *shall wail because of him:*‡ and *shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power, when he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believed the testimony of him in that day.*§ *For the Lord shall descend from Heaven with a shout, with the voice of the arch-angel and with the trump of God: and the dead in Christ shall rise first; and they which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air, and so shall we be ever with the Lord.*‖

* Deut. xxix. 20. † Col. iii. 1. 4. ‡ Rev. i. 7.
§ 2 Thess i. 9, 10. ‖ 1 Thess. iv. 15, 16, 17.

SERMON XVII.

2 COR. v. 20.

NOW THEN WE ARE EMBASSADORS FOR CHRIST, AS THOUGH GOD DID BESEECH YOU BY US; WE PRAY YOU IN CHRIST'S STEAD, BE YE RECONCILED TO GOD.

THE ministers of the gospel ought ever to have in their minds the end of their office, that they may diligently use the right means to attain it: and the people under our care should be no less attentive to it, in order to receive, by co-operating faithfully with us, the benefits intended to be conveyed to them through our hands. Now the nature of our commission is set forth in the text: where you have

I. The character in which we act, *embassadors for Christ.*

II. The errand, on which we are sent, to *pray men* that they would *be reconciled to God.*

I. Our character is that of *embassadors for Christ,* which means *instead of* Christ, as the same word is translated in the latter part of the verse. God sent his Son into the world, as the messenger of his covenant; the person, by whom he notified his gracious promises, and the conditions of them to mankind. When he ceased to instruct them personally, his words to his Apostles were, *as the Father hath sent me, even so send I you**. Nor did he send the twelve

* John xx. 21.

only, but gave to his church other pastors and teachers also, *for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of his body, till we all come unto perfect men in Christ**, and promised to be *with them alway even unto the end of the world*†. Such therefore the Apostles appointed in every city; deputed them to *work the work of the Lord, as they themselves did;*‡ directed some of these to appoint others,§ as *feeders of the flock, under Christ the chief shepherd;*‖ required them to *exhort and rebuke with all authority,*¶ and commanded Christians *to submit to them, as watchmen over their souls, who must give account.***

God forbid, that you should have cause to be alarmed at the highest of these claims. The same Scripture on which they are founded, guards against it sufficiently. As to temporal matters: our Saviour's *kingdom is not of this world*††; nor have his ministers, as such, any peculiar right to interfere in the affairs of it. *The Lord* indeed *hath ordained, that they who preach the Gospel, should live of the Gospel*‡‡. But what provision should be made for that purpose, he hath left entirely to the conscience and the prudence of men. Our authority of demanding even a maintenance from the unwilling, and certainly then the further privileges that any of us enjoy, are derived solely from the voluntary gift of the civil power. And as to spiritual concerns: the very Apostles were bound to teach only what their Master commanded. And they indeed could not mistake any part of it: but we may; and therefore you are not obliged to believe implicitly what we affirm. So far still as persons are sensible, that they cannot deter-

* Eph. iv. 12, 13. † Matth. xxviii. 20. ‡ 1 Cor. xvi. 10
§ 2 Tim. ii. 2.—Tit. i. 5. ‖ 1 Pet. v. 2, 4. ¶ Tit. ii. 5.
** Heb. xiii. 17. †† John xviii. 36. ‡‡ 1 Cor. ix. 14

mine for themselves, they should follow their established guides, if they have reason to think them skilful and honest. But to all others we apply as St. Paul did: *I speak as to wise men: judge ye what I say.**

Whatever appears true to any man by his own reason, or to any Christian by the word of God, he ought to observe, though no one reminded him of it. And whatever any one else proves to him, though absolutely unauthorised, he is bound to admit. But when God himself, knowing man's need and yet unwillingness to be taught, hath expressly ordained a succession of persons to execute that employment: if either we neglect to give, or you to receive instruction, it is a highly aggravated contempt of his authority, and of his mercy. *We have* indeed *this treasure in earthen vessels*:† and too often add sins to our infirmities, by which we dishonour him we represent, and shall bring down severe punishment on our own heads. But still, as in temporal societies, officers, though bad and unfit men, must be duly obeyed, as far as their commission extends in respect to the supreme power, under which they act; so in the spiritual one of the church, when you hear the truths of religion from the worst of us all, you are to receive them as the Word of God, for such indeed they are, not as the word of men. And a message from him deserves the utmost honour; let them, who bring it, deserve what they will.

Are you then, careful to regard what we say the more if there be reason to think well of us; but as little prejudiced against it as possible, if there be not: or do you slight the commands of your Maker, when they come by a person whom you do not

* 1 Cor. x. 15. † 2 Cor. iv. 7.

esteem, or barely do not like? But if you like him ever so well, attend on him ever so constantly, applaud him ever so highly, and stop there; you have done nothing. It is not entertainment, it is *the law*, that you are to *seek at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the Lord of Hosts.** You are to look beyond us, to the end of our mission: not to pay us any such deference, even for that, as may endanger our humility, lessen our usefulness, and pervert us into instruments of harm instead of good; but only to excite in your minds, from a due veneration of him who sends us, a due attention to what the text mentions.

II. The errand he sends us upon. Were that merely to notify a doctrine ever so strange, short of palpable absurdity, a command ever so difficult, a threatening ever so severe, you would be bound to receive it, on the authority of proper credentials, with the most submissive reverence. But what is the message that his ministers bring you from him? *Be ye reconciled to God.* Surely a most gracious, but at the same time a very alarming one. For you will say, are we enemies to him then? Why doubtless the expression implies, that possibly we may. And it is our highest concern to inquire immediately, (if we have not done it) whether we be or not.

By nature we are children of wrath:† involved in the mortality, to which our first parents were condemned; in the corruption, with which they tainted themselves. We experience both. And God must consider our bad inclinations, however we came by them, with dislike as well as pity: and may justly leave us in this fallen estate, unless we make use of the proper means to be relieved from it. What care then have you taken in this respect? "*We have*

* Mal. 2. 7. † Eph. ii. 3.

*been by baptism regenerate and grafted into the body of Christ's church :** and we have personally ratified since, the vow then made in our name." You have done well: and these things intitle you, to assistance from above for amending yourselves, and to eternal life on condition of your endeavouring it faithfully. But all men have broken this condition by actual sin. What have you done then to renew your covenant? Have you lamented your failings, and redoubled your watchfulness: or have you tamely given way to irregular appetites and passions? have you not indeed striven to excuse, to justify, to encourage, to make provision for them? sometimes perhaps you have resisted them: but from what principle? From that of conscience towards God: or of interest, convenience, reputation only? If the latter, they are no religious motives. If the former, have you resisted in all sorts of temptations, and in the main successfully? "No: we must own, we have commonly been overpowered; and are so still." Why, in proportion as this is your case, both reason and Scripture pronounce it a bad one: for *without holiness*, habitual piety and virtue, *no man shall see the Lord.*† Are you then trying all methods to increase your strength: or do you give up the contest; sometimes perhaps a little grieved; but oftener secretly glad, that you have gotten so specious a pretence, as that of your weakness, for living as you like?

But you will say, how are we to increase our strength? Partly, by representing to yourselves seriously and frequently, the baseness and the danger of sinning against God; by avoiding resolutely the things and the persons that incline you to it; by reading good books, and hearing good advice in pub-

* Office of Baptism. † Heb. xii. 14.

lic and private. Something of all this you have probably done: but whether near so much as you could, ask your own hearts. Or supposing you have: there is one essential point wanting. Have you applied to your heavenly Father for his help? Scripture and experience prove, that *we are not sufficient of ourselves**. Now he is completely able, he is intirely willing, he hath expressly promised, to assist us. But he justly expects, that we should own our dependence on him, by asking his aid. And if we are too proud, or too negligent for that, he leaves us to the consequences. "Yes: but we have prayed, as well as endeavoured, and all to no purpose." But how have you prayed? Only as a matter of course perhaps, without much persuasion, that it would do you any great good; without inward penitence and humiliation; without attention and earnestness; or however without due perseverance. And what can you expect from such prayers?

But supposing, that you are satisfied with yourselves on these heads, what plea have you made to God for his pardon and help? "That of his infinite mercy." But his mercy flows to mankind in a particular channel. *God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself,* as the verse before the text teaches. Have you then applied through him? Persons ignorant of him indeed cannot: and the Judge of all will undoubtedly consider their case with equity. But if you, to whom he is revealed, seek to be reconciled without him, it is resolving not to be reconciled at all. "No: we have prayed in his name constantly." But hath it been with any inward sense of what he hath done for you, and is to you; with any real faith and trust in his atonement and grace,

* 2 Cor. iii. 5.

disclaiming all merit of your own; with any fixed and active resolution to *take his yoke upon you,** and observe his appointments in order to attain his likeness? Possibly you will plead, that such faith and resolution are not in your power: *they are the gift of God,*† as appears from Scripture: and therefore it is none of your fault if you have them not. But it is in your power to yield to *his spirit* when he *strives with you,*‡ to dwell on his convictions of your sins and your danger, to cherish desires of what you want, to endeavour at what you are commanded, to use the means which the Gospel prescribes. If you have done thus, go on to do it, and you will infallibly succeed. If not, this is the method, which, *as though God did beseech you by us, we pray you in Christ's stead,* to take, that ye may *be reconciled to God.* Whilst you neglect it, you can be no other than his enemies: and think with yourselves, we beg you, in the next place, how joyless, how terrible a situation that must be.

He is infinitely wise: and therefore knows what is best for us. He is infinitely good: and therefore his directions point it out to us. He is perfectly just and holy: and therefore loves right and abhors wrong behaviour. His power is irresistible, and therefore he can reward or punish to the utmost: his veracity is unquestionable, and therefore he will reward or punish eternally. What can we then promise ourselves by disobedience to him: what may we not promise ourselves by obedience? Our worldly enjoyments, at best, are low and uncertain; our sufferings many and severe; our comforts and supports under them poor and few; a very great part of our time is spent meanly and contemptibly, if not insipidly and tediously. What a situation is this, if we are to

* Matth. xi. 39. † Eph. ii. 8. ‡ Gen. vi. 3.

take it for our all, without God and without hope! We are strangely apt indeed to flatter ourselves daily with prospects of this and that pleasure and advantage soon to come. But if we look back, what very great and lasting satisfaction hath the highest and the happiest of us ever had: and what better ground is there to expect any in the remainder of our days? Undoubtedly we have enough to be thankful for, and much more than we have deserved. But is it enough to rest in, and desire nothing farther? Shall we feel ourselves persuaded, on cool reflection at the close of life, that going round and round the circle of our present amusements and pursuits, in the manner that we have done, and being disappointed continually by every one of them in its turn, is all the good that a rational soul needs wish; especially while heavenly and eternal bliss lies within our view and within our reach? This would be a grovelling way of thinking indeed. But suppose our days are cut short in the middle or the beginning: suppose our gratifications are peculiarly few; or our distresses peculiarly heavy: still shall we aim at nothing better? At least, shall we not guard against something unspeakably worse? For consider; God is our Maker and Lord: this intitles him to our faithful service. He is our Benefactor by all that he hath given, and all that he is ready to give us: this demands our most affectionate gratitude. And if we deny him either, he will and must shew to the whole creation which he governs, that they who sin, shall, unless they apply for pardon in the manner directed by him, suffer in proportion. Now they do not suffer thus here: and therefore they will hereafter. Are you then contented, rather than be reconciled to God, besides losing the promise of his favour, to undergo, first the terrors, then the

torments of his future displeasure, such as his word hath described them? Think a little of this, What should induce you to it?

If love of sensual gratifications tempt you to disobey him: irregular ones will almost always end, and commonly soon, even in present misery. If worldly interest: both forbidden methods, and immoderate desires of promoting it will entangle you in perplexities, disquiet you with solicitude, and stain you with dishonour; you will often miss your aim, and never be long satisfied with obtaining it. If resentment or any species of malevolence bias you, this is being habitually and exquisitely wretched, only for the cause of an occasional joy in mischief, that will make you almost as hateful to man as to God. Or could any of these things afford you a delight ever so unmixed, how very quick is the whole scene of them passing away! Doth pride then rule within you, and represent submission to your Creator, as beneath you? But do you not obey and honour your earthly superiors? Do you not expect your inferiors to shew every appointed, every customary mark of honour and obedience to you; and even an implicit compliance with your directions? Why then is not the Author and absolute Disposer of your being, worthy of the most unreserved duty, the most respectful homage; and where is the meanness of paying it?

But you are apprehensive perhaps of being despised and ridiculed for your piety and virtue. But shall you not be approved and applauded by the wise and good, by many of the bad themselves, by the Judge of all and his holy angels at the great day? But, it may be, you have doubts about religion: and therefore you do not set heartily to practise it. Seek for information properly then, and hearken to it fairly. Practise conscientiously what you cannot doubt of: keep to the

safer side, where you do doubt: make sure, that no sinful inclination prejudices you: be content, though you do not see every thing, if you see enough to direct your steps; and you will soon discern, which way is best to take. But you are afraid of not persevering: or though you should, of not succeeding. Try however at least. Honest endeavours, if they do no more, will alleviate your guilt. But by continuing them, you must gain some ground: and should you fall after that, and seem to lose it; you may rise again, and learn skill from your defeats to obtain at last the victory. Using the prescribed means, you have God's promise for it: and how small soever your own strength may be, his hath no bounds.

Why doubtless, you will say, he can do every thing: but you have been a great sinner; and you know not how to think he will either help or even forgive you. And certain it is, that you have not deserved it: nor can you, of yourself, be sure of it. But still common reason gives you some hope. You are frail: he is good: his forbearance is a degree of forgiveness. Repenting, confessing, striving, must render your condition better, than a contrary behaviour would. How much indeed, he himself alone can tell. And therefore, if you want further encouragement, as well you may, look into his holy word. There he hath granted *knowledge of salvation to his people, by the remission of their sins, through the tender mercy of our God, whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us, to give light to them that sit in darkness and the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace.** Nay, our offended Benefactor and Lawgiver and Judge, not only permits, but *beseeches you to be reconciled.* Nor hath he sent this request by a

* Luke i. 77, 78, 79.

common messenger, but by his only Son, *who had glory with him before the world was,** *who in the beginning was with God, and was God.*† Nor hath he sent him, barely to make a publication of it, from Heaven, and return: but to take upon him our nature, bear the inconveniences of a low condition of life, suffer indignities, persecution and death; to reconcile forgiving goodness with justice and wisdom; to notify, to prove, to conquer prejudices against the blessed union of these attributes. Nor even, after all this, hath he left men to remember his gracious invitation to forget it, as they please: but established a perpetual succession of persons, authorized and commanded to repeat it, weekly and daily, in public and in private, to every age, every nation, every sinner; and enforce it by the strongest motives, that can affect the human heart; but especially that most engaging one which follows the text: *Be ye reconciled to God; for he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him.*

So astonishing a method, we may be sure, had never been taken, had not God, who knows best, seen our case was too bad for less powerful remedies. And the goodness of our heavenly Father in appointing this, of his Son in submitting to it, of his Holy Spirit in applying it to our diseased hearts, is, as the Apostle justly expresses himself, *a love that passeth knowledge.*‡ That thus much should be done for any offenders, is beyond all imagination: yet it is done for the very worst. But then all this mercy is conditional; its final effect depends on ourselves. And *how shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation,* thus obtained for us: which *at first began to be spoken by*

* John xvii. 5. † John i. 1. ‡ Eph. iii. 19.

*the Lord, was confirmed by them that heard him;** and is offered to you, and pressed upon you continually by his ministers, who act for him, represent him, and beseech you in his stead? Every step, taken for your recovery, aggravates your guilt, if it be taken in vain. And there remaineth *no more sacrifice for sins,*† *no other ministry of reconciliation,*‡ if you omit to be reconciled by this.

"But, you will say, we hope we are at peace with God." If you hope it on good grounds, his name be praised. But what grounds have you? "We attend his worship: we live regular lives: few, if any of our neighbours, better." But do you attend all the ordinances of his worship, and constantly; and, to the best of your power, with your minds as well as your bodies? Are your lives regular in every thing, and no wrong inclinations, either of flesh or spirit, indulged? Think a while of this. What your neighbours are, you know but imperfectly; and it concerns you but little: both they and you shall be condemned, if you are not what you ought. Possibly enough you stand well in the estimation of men: but are you faultless in the eyes of God? Certainly not. For *in his sight shall no man living be justified.*§ Every deed, every word, every thought, hath its failure and its guilt belonging to it. Are you then convinced of your fallen and lost condition, of the imperfection, the insufficiency, the sinfulness of what is best in you; deeply humble, on this account, before *the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is holy;*‖ sensible of your need of his pardon and grace; thankful believers in the satisfaction of his Son, in the sanctifying influences of his spirit? Do you accordingly pray to

* Heb. ii. 3. † Heb. x. 26. ‡ 2 Cor. v. 18.
§ Ps. cxliii. 2. ‖ Is. lvii. 15.

him daily in private, from the bottom of your soul; examine diligently your outward behaviour, your inward movements of heart, as in his presence; yield up yourselves to his will, and make it your great aim to serve and please him: not only in acts of faith and devotion, (though indispensable and most important duties) but in a conduct of benevolence and equity, of mildness, usefulness and bounty to all your fellow-creatures; in lowliness of mind, in chastity, sobriety and temperance? Have you considered well, not merely what your own very fallible, and perhaps very partial reasonings suggest to you, but what his word requires of you? Are you honestly careful to observe all its rules: and do you find produced in yourselves by them, a spirit of love and duty to God; and a desire, superior to all others, of enjoying a spiritual happiness for ever with him? What is the answer of your consciences to these questions?

If an unfavourable one; do not despair, be it ever so much so: for we have an high Priest, *able to save to the uttermost them that come to God by him* * But lose not a moment's time: press home your convictions on your souls; beg his intercession, plead his merits, follow his directions, *acquaint yourselves with him, and be at peace.*† If it be a doubtful answer: can you bear to continue in doubt concerning your great, your eternal interest; impatient as you are apt to be of uncertainty in very small matters? That would be a bad sign indeed. "But how shall we remove the doubt?" Not by perplexing yourselves with guesses in the dark: but by removing the cause. Whatever you find amiss, after praying to God for pardon and strength, set immediately to amend; and in proportion to your progress, you will have the only

* Heb. vii. 25. † Job xxii. 21.

true ground of comfort. For *hereby know we, that we know him, if we keep his commandments.** Whoever doth so, though imperfectly, yet sincerely and humbly, hath nothing to fear: whoever doth not, hath nothing to hope. Strong feelings of joyful assurance may be given to the pious from above, as a present reward: and strong feelings of vain presumption may lead on the wicked, secure and triumphant, to their final destruction. Very reasonable terrors, from consciousness of their guilt, may torment the bad before-hand: and very unreasonable ones, from constitution, or the suggestions of Satan, may assault the good. Therefore we are to judge of our condition by none of these things; but by the Scripture rule, fairly interpreted: *Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doth righteousness is righteous: he that committeth sin is of the Devil.*†

If then obedience to the Gospel is the principle, by which you designedly and habitually govern your lives: Thank God for it, take comfort in it, and be happy, whatever befalls you in this world. But still remember, that every degree of sin remaining is a degree of enmity remaining: and who then hath not need *to be reconciled* more completely? St. Paul had already told the persons, to whom he speaks in the text, that *his hope of them was stedfast; knowing, that as they were partakers of the sufferings of Christ they should be partakers of his consolation also.*§ But notwithstanding this, he continues to beseech them, *Be ye reconciled to God.* If we see into ourselves at all, the best of us must see, that there are many things in us, which we cannot approve. If we have any due sense of his goodness to us, and of love to him in return; we shall earnestly wish and labour to be more pleasing to him,

* 1 John ii. 3. † John iii. 7, 8. ‡ 2 Cor. i. 7.

and more like him. If we have any experience of what is true happiness here, or any ambition of a high rank in happiness hereafter, we shall surely reflect that both depend on our improvements in pure religion and genuine virtue. If we have any right apprehension of the dangers, that surround us, we must foresee, that unless we press forward, we shall be driven back and fall: but the further we advance, on the surer ground we shall stand. And if we have any just zeal for the glory of our blessed Redeemer; we shall deeply lament, that our failings have so frequently given others occasion to *blaspheme that worthy name, whereby we are called*;* and shall use our utmost endeavours to adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things:† which that we may accordingly, he of his infinite mercy grant: to whom be all honour and praise, now and for ever. *Amen.*

* James ii. 7. † Tit. ii. 10.

SERMON XVIII.

ROM. vi. 21.

WHAT FRUIT HAD YE THEN IN THOSE THINGS, WHEREOF YE ARE NOW ASHAMED? FOR THE END OF THOSE THINGS IS DEATH.

THE first resolution, which every one should take in the conduct of life, is to deliberate seriously, as soon as he becomes capable of it, by what rule his future behaviour shall be formed. And one principal cause of the follies, which men commit, and the miseries into which they fall, is their strange neglect of this obvious duty: a duty impossible to be controverted; for it is only inquiring what will be most for our interest.

And yet a very great part of mankind never once think of any certain rule at all for their conduct; but go on at random, indulging the present inclination, which way soever it leads and how often soever it may vary: and thus fill up a life of thoughtless inconsistency, aiming at no one end beyond pleasing themselves any how for the time, let what will follow. But surely a very little reflection might shew, that what pleases us now, may ruin us ere long, perhaps very soon: that different courses of life have very different consequences, highly deserving our attention: and in particular, that those of a virtuous and a vicious life differ so extremely, that we ought not to continue an hour undetermined, longer than we must, which we shall pursue. What the prophet Elijah said to the

Israelites belongs equally to all of this unsettled character: *How long halt ye between two opinions? If the Lord be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him.** Why this perpetual wavering and fluctuation, about the first thing, that you ought to fix; the one point, on which all depends! If a profane and immoral conduct will produce and secure happiness to you, follow profaneness and immorality, *yield your members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin.*† But if religion and virtue be the means of true and lasting self-enjoyment, let religion and virtue be your care, and *yield yourselves servants of righteousness unto God.*‡ *Chuse ye therefore this day whom ye will serve.*§

And there are indeed multitudes, that would give sufficient proofs of having made a choice, and a very ill one, if running headlong into wickedness merited the name of chusing it. But rational choice presupposes due consideration: whereas these poor wretches have suffered themselves to be led on blindfold, by example and custom, unexamined appearances and ungoverned inclinations, with no more notion of inquiring, whether they are in the right road, than if there were no other at all. Or if ever they have deliberated, they have done it unfairly or superficially; or upon some one point of their behaviour, not the whole; and perhaps, only which of two interfering desires, both of them wrong, they should gratify. But surely the first division of human conduct is into religious and irreligious. Which of these two we ought to prefer, is the question that we are to begin with: and it will be time enough to consider, in what way we shall be bad, after we have examined, whether it is not our wisdom to be good.

* 1 Kings xviii. 21.
† Rom. vi. 13.
‡ Rom. vi. 18, 19.
§ Josh. xxiv. 15.

In this most important inquiry an imperfect view of things may easily deceive us, and doth in fact deceive the generality of mankind. We must therefore be very careful to lay before ourselves the whole of what is to be expected, hoped or feared. But indeed both our own passions and appetites, and the opinions and practices of the world, will be sure to remind us abundantly of what makes in favour of prohibited indulgences. And consequently, in order to keep our judgment upright, we must be diligent in representing to ourselves what makes against them. And we cannot possibly do it in a better method, than that of the Apostle, addressing himself to the Roman converts: *What fruit had ye then in those things, whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.*

In these words is proposed to our serious thoughts,

I. The present unprofitableness of sin.

II. The shamefulness of it.

III. The punishment, which awaits it.

I shall be able in this discourse to consider only the first point, the unprofitableness of sin, even at present. And for this he appeals to the hearts and consciences of those, with whom he argues: *What fruit had ye then in those things?* well knowing they must own, that upon trial they had found none: a confession, which very few have ever failed to make, when after a life, spent in wickedness, they came to reflect coolly, what real advantage they had gained by it on the upshot. The language of those, who will be prevailed on to balance that great account, is almost universally the same, which Elihu in Job ascribes to the penitent, *I have sinned, and perverted that which was right, and it profited me not.** Some may imagine this to

* Job xxxiii. 27.

arise from a disposition, which we have, to be discontented; and to think, after a while, any other way better, than that which we have chosen. But how comes it to pass then, that no pious and virtuous man was ever known, calmly and deliberately, to make the same declaration concerning his manner of life? Nothing hath been more common in all ages, than for the wicked to acknowledge their mistakes and their misery, and exhort others to take warning by them. But the good, as soon as ever they had time to become habitually such, have always pronounced themselves easy and happy; and thought it the greatest kindness, that they could do to those, whom they loved the most tenderly, to beg they would tread in their steps. Now, in other cases, we look on the agreeing testimony of those, who have experienced what they affirm, as being decisive. Why then should we distrust them in this alone; and obstinately insist upon trying what they forewarn us aloud will be fatal? Indeed, have not some of us tried much too far already? And, for God's sake, let us ask ourselves, what fruit we have had from it, and what we are likely to have, in case we proceed further.

But if we will reckon the experience of others incompetent, and our own imperfect, let us consider the natural tendency of sin. Should we be unable to discover from thence, why it should do us harm, we may doubt whether it doth the harm, that we are told, or will go on to do the harm that we have hitherto felt from it: but if we see, that in its nature it must be unprofitable and hurtful, as well as learn from the experience of others and our own that it is so, then surely nothing will be wanting to convince us.

Now we all know, however apt we are to forget it, that reason is the principal part of our frame: thence

therefore if we are made with any wisdom, we must expect the principal part of our happiness: and yet every sort of wickedness is absolutely contradictory to reason. Undutifulness to an almighty superior, and ingratitude to a gracious benefactor, such as God is; unkindness to our relations and friends, hard-heartedness to persons in distress, injustice or implacability to any one, or uselessness to those, who are useful to us: degrading ourselves below the rank of our nature, and living only or chiefly to brutal appetites, though we are men; or to trifling pleasures, though we have capacities for much worthier employments: all these things are evidently unreasonable and unfit, as any thing can be. And what advantage or what quiet can we hope in disobeying that principle, which was plainly designed to rule us?

Besides, our affections were doubtless originally intended to accord with reason: and though much disordered by the fall of our first parents, yet in a considerable measure they do so still. Now can we question, but that disorder is the cause of misery to us here? And if so, the greater we make it by acts of sin, the greater our misery will be; and the more we rectify it by acts of piety and virtue, the nearer we shall return to our natural state, in which alone every thing flourishes and doth well. Right reason and right affection were the primitive rules, that God gave man to live by: and how can we fancy that we shall ever find our account in putting a force upon them, and wresting ourselves from under their government?

But a farther and very material consideration is, that all kinds of wickedness manifestly tend to destroy the good order, prosperity and peace, of kingdoms, of

communities, of families: and that indeed the injuries which men do to one another by transgressing the laws of God, make up the heaviest and bitterest part of the sufferings of life. Now what is contrary to the interest of all in general, must be in some degree prejudicial to that of every one in particular: and each person who is guilty of it, *teaches* others *an evil lesson against himself.** The vicious, even those who value themselves the most on their good nature, are one way or another, perhaps many ways, perpetually doing mischief. They are indeed enemies, as far as their influence reaches, to the whole society of mankind. It is the general interest of the world to oppose and discourage them. It is the particular business of government to restrain and punish them. All that suffer considerably by them, will be sure to abominate them: and most others will scorn and despise them. Now it is a dreadful evil to lose a blessing so justly dear to men, as that of a good name and reputation. To be abhorred, or even suspected and distrusted, by those amongst whom we live, is hardly supportable: to be merely disliked and disapproved, is very mortifying. Yet one or other of these they must expect: not only from the religious and worthy, whose esteem ought to be and ever will be chiefly desired, but also from their fellow sinners; who constantly condemn the sins, which they do not practise, and often those which they do. Sometimes indeed some of them may join in applauding their common follies: but that makes them never the less follies. Sometimes, for private ends, persons may flatter for a while such as they inwardly hold in derision or detestation. But this kind of court never doth good to those who re-

* Eccles. ix. 1.

ceive it: nor is it able to hinder but that on the whole mischievous vices will produce hatred, and imprudent ones contempt. And what fruit can men reap from such things?

But hitherto you have heard proofs only of the common ill effects of all sins: let us now consider the several sorts and the fruits of each of them, separately.

Some of our bad inclinations are necessarily, in the very feeling of them, uneasy and painful: as envy, hatred and anger. Others are so at least in their immediate consequences: disquieting our minds with wearisome and endless pursuits, of what we shall either not obtain or not keep, or be little or nothing the better for, if we do. Such is the exorbitant thirst of power and rank and wealth: always restless and dissatisfied, always full of discontents and disappointments. Again, some of them prompt us to overvalue ourselves, often to our great damage; and at the same time provoke others to undervalue us: as do pride and vanity. Some, if they are accompanied with no pain, yet can make no pretence to giving any pleasure: as profaneness. And the seeming pleasure of some others is in reality scarce more than getting rid of a torment, which a good mind would never have experienced. Such, and no better, is the joy of revenge. Nay, where criminal gratifications are the most agreeable, as in sensual indulgences; besides that they are usually very fleeting and short-lived, perhaps an equal, perhaps a superior degree of them on the whole, might by the means of prudence have been obtained consistently with virtue: which doth not forbid the regular and seasonable and temperate satisfaction of any desire, but only restrains us with in due and safe bounds: whereas the vicious, affecting immoderate and prohibited liberties, are indeed the un-

happiest slaves to their own lusts and fancies; especially when by a habit of yielding to them, they have taught them to claim, with absolute authority, the most pernicious compliances. And in this situation, how much inward anguish must there often lie hid under the gayest shews of mirth and amusement; whether the soul be oppressed by the settled tyranny of a single passion, or torn in pieces by the rage of opposite ones, contending for mastery! * Then, what destructive effects the sins of this kind have on the healths and fortunes of their votaries, disqualifying them, often in the beginning of life, for the enjoyment of every thing in which they placed the happiness of it, and exposing them to great distresses and sufferings throughout the remainder, is much too well known to need enlarging on, though much less considered, than its importance requires.

But too many imagine, that, whatever others do, they shall sin with discretion; gratify their inclinations, and carry on their designs, of whatever sort they be, with so much art as to avoid all manner of bad consequences. But why do they imagine so? It is hard enough to govern our passions before they have been accustomed to indulgence. But first to indulge them, and then think to stop where we please, is a scheme that always hath deceived, and always will deceive, those who are weak enough to rely upon it. Virtuous behaviour hath plain and firm ground to stand upon: but if once we quit our sure footing there, the declivity is endless, the tendency downwards will increase every

* Sic distrahuntur in contrarias partes impotentium cupiditates: cum huic obsecutus sis, illi est repugnandum. Cic. Tusc. Disp. l. 5 § 20. Intus etiam in animis inclusæ cupiditates inter se dissident atque discordant: ex quo vitam amarissimam necesse est effici. Cic. de Fin. l. 1. § 13, Comp. §. 18.

moment, and how far we may be carried, God only knows. They who have gone the most fatal lengths in sin resolved at first, as much as you can do, to proceed cautiously: never once questioning but they could keep their resolution, till it was too late. And it may very soon be too late with any of us. For not only the habit of every vice leads men farther and farther in it, but the most different vices are strangely connected with each other: and he who intended to allow himself in but one seemingly harmless transgression, is drawn by it gradually, or hurried unawares, into numbers of worse, that end in his ruin; the grace of God being justly withdrawn from such presumptuous offenders.

But it will be objected, that however unprofitable some sins may be, yet others are peculiarly calculated for profit; as covetousness, with its retainers fraud and extortion: which the *wise in their generation** would never practise, unless they found the advantage of them, as they visibly do. Now if by advantage be meant, what should be meant, real happiness, they visibly do not. Covetousness is peculiarly a miserable passion: and distinguished by that very name of *miserable* in common speech. The temper itself is full of fears and cares, alarms and suspicions. Then, in order to gratify it, every benevolent, if not every honest, disposition of our hearts must be contradicted; and when it rises to a certain height, every innocent enjoyment of life, that carries the least expence with it, must either be renounced, or grudged, while it is tolerated. But without running to such extremes, to all avaricious minds the smallest losses will be heavy misfortunes; and the greatest gains will want something of being so great as they should have been.

* Luke xvi. 8.

They must undergo the pain of envying every one that is in circumstances above them: they must expect at the same time the ill will of every one beneath them: and after all, their unnatural cravings, far from being appeased, will increase much faster, than their possessions; and the more eagerly they endeavour to quench their thirst, the more fiercely it will return upon them. Or let us suppose, if you will, the desire of gain to be indulged, not with the absurd view of hoarding to no purpose and no end; but for the delight of satisfying more natural inclinations by the means of great wealth: yet, if these be moderate and reasonable, they may be very competently satisfied without it; and, if they be excessive, you have seen already that they are hurtful and therefore ought not to have provision made for them.

If then covetousness of both sorts be unwise; fraud and extortions, which only serve as instruments of covetousness, cannot be beneficial. But on the contrary, they have peculiar disadvantages belonging to them. There are indeed instances, too frequently, of riches acquired by indirect methods: but still dishonesty hath ruined many more than it hath raised: and the ruin of such is never pitied, and seldom retrieved. Fair dealing is the plain path, which God hath marked out for mankind to go in: and they who think to be too cunning for their Maker, are few of them able to depart from it without injuring themselves even now, as much or more than they do others. One half of the contrivance and circumspection, that men are obliged to in a knavish way, would have enabled them to thrive very well in an honest one, without the hatred and curse of all around them, without the perpetual dread of being detected, and the loss they must suffer, whenever that happens, (which seldom fails) both by

others declining to have any further concern with them, and perhaps by the penalties which the law will inflict on them. Or let them escape these dangers ever so well; yet how often doth it fall out, that either what they have acquired wickedly, they squander foolishly, it may be wickedly too, and so nothing remains with them but the guilt of both; or, at least, posterity, for whose sake chiefly they have taken these unrighteous pains, dissipate in a few years what they have been accumulating in many; and very possibly give them the torment, which they have well deserved, of shewing them beforehand, that they will dissipate it! And thus is the Scripture warning verified: *An inheritance may be gotten hastily at the beginning; but the end thereof shall not be blessed.**

You see then how many and great the present and worldly inconveniences of wickedness are: and I have dwelt on them so largely because present and worldly things are apt to affect us so much. Yet still it must be acknowledged, that all of them do not follow constantly, and that sometimes considerable advantages in appearance may be gained by transgressing our duty. But perhaps even then as considerable ones of the same kind may be lost by it: for men cannot have the benefit of two opposite characters and behaviours at the same time. Or, if every thing should happen to their wish, the probability notwithstanding lay greatly on the other side: the contrary was to have been expected: and therefore no wise person would ever run the hazard though now and then some one may chance to find his account in it.

But indeed we are as yet only in the first article of

* Prov. xx. 21.

the account; and have by no means completed that. Not only the positive outward evils, that wickedness brings upon us, but the inward satisfactions and comforts of which it deprives us, must be taken in. Sincerity of good will, openness of confidence, faithfulness of friendship, tenderness of affection, consciousness of merited esteem, are the sweetest ingredients in human life. Now all these, with all the complacency and joy of heart that flows from them, the wicked, by their ambitious, their covetous, their sensual pursuits, by their resentments, their falsehoods, their neglects, their provocations, exclude themselves from enjoying: wear out from their hearts by degrees the most delightful sensibilities of which human nature is capable; and leave nothing there, but the wretched feelings of hating or disregarding others, and being hated or disregarded by them. Then, in the various afflictions and crosses of life, in decaying health, sinking spirits, and declining age, a good man hath many supports, from the innocence and integrity of his past life, from the love and gratitude of his friends, from the firm belief of a wise and kind providence, continually watching over him. But none of these consolations belong to a wicked man, when he is in the same condition: the things in which he placed his whole happiness have failed him and are gone; the companions of his prosperity desert him, the world rejoices over him, Heaven frowns upon him, and his own heart condemns him.

But this would lead me to the second head, the shame attending sin. After that, there remains a third, of the future punishment awaiting it. Both these, God willing, shall be distinctly set before you: and then you will see in the fullest light, whatever

may seem wanting to the evidence of it now, that *the knowledge of wickedness is not wisdom; neither at any time the counsel of sinners, prudence.**

God grant we may all be convinced of this while it will do us good! To Him, with his Son and blessed Spirit, be all honour and glory, now and for ever. Amen.

* Eccles xix. 22.

SERMON XIX.

ROM. vi. 21.

WHAT FRUIT HAD YE THEN IN THOSE THINGS, WHEREOF YE ARE NOW ASHAMED? FOR THE END OF THOSE THINGS IS DEATH.

IN discoursing on these words, I have proposed to lay before you,

I. The present disadvantages of a wicked life.

II. The shamefulness of it.

III. The punishment, which awaits it hereafter.

The first of these heads I have finished: and shewn, from the testimony of the wicked themselves, from the inconsistence of all sin with the principles of our reason, from its repugnancy to the original dictates of our affections, from its pernicious influence on every branch of human society, that it must in general produce unspeakable harm to us. Then I proceeded to prove, in relation to several sins more particularly, that some of them are in their very nature painful; and that the pleasures, which others promise, are either false and imaginary, or inconsiderable and short-lived, or, to all the purposes of real happiness, equally attainable for the most part, by virtuous means: but that the evils, which they bring on, are various and great, and often speedy, and seldom avoided by the utmost care: that even those sins which may seem peculiarly calculated for profit and

advantage, are in truth as unprofitable and hurtful as the rest and that lastly, besides leading men into the most grievous inconveniencies and sufferings, wickedness deprives them of the most valuable even of their worldly enjoyments, comforts, and supports.

Were we therefore only to consider, how unhappily it affects all the common and acknowledged ingredients of our present well-being, a course of sin, on stating the account merely thus, would be found, though perhaps not without exceptions, yet with but few exceptions, and such as no one could rationally expect in his own favour, a course of folly: as accordingly we see it constantly represented, even with respect to this world, not only by the sacred writers. but the greatest and ablest of Heathens themselves; both such as had some belief of a future state, and such as had none.

But for our fuller satisfaction in a point of this moment, let us proceed farther to consider,

II. The shamefulness of it.

Now shame is of two sorts: arising from a consciousness of having acted either foolishly against our interest, or wickedly against our duty. I begin with the first.

An immoral life being so full of imprudence and suffering as you have seen it is, many and severe reflections on their own mistaken choice, must unavoidably torture the minds of the vicious, from time to time, be they ever so industrious to banish them. The absurdity of the things, which they say and do in the madness of their debauches; the contemptibleness of their condition, while they languish under the effects of them: the miserable wages, which they receive for their hard servitude to low appetites; the meanness of going on with what they have a

thousand times resolved to leave off; the wretched shifts, that they must use to support the expences of their irregularities; the embarrassments into which the most circumspect of them are continually running by unfair practices; the grievous disappointments, which the wisest of them experience, from what promised, as they imagined, the truest and highest satisfaction; the extraordinary pains which they have taken, to be never the happier, and are taking still, only to be farther from their end than ever; these are considerations, that will find a season to make their way both into the gayest and the busiest minds, and often embitter the relish of their pleasures and their prosperity, even while they are at the height.

But when any remarkable check hath been given to the sinner in his course; when the iniquities of the fraudulent have exposed him to disgrace and loss, or the extravagances of the spendthrift reduced him to indigence, when the strength and spirits of the dissolute are worn out, or advancing years have brought on satiety and disgust: then, with full leisure for thinking of their doings, and perhaps inability for thinking of any thing else, to see that they have scorned the dictates of reason and the counsels of the discreet and good, only to become miserable; what confusion must they feel from it: they, who applauded so highly the wisdom of their own way of life, as the only one worth living for, and ridiculed with such unspeakable contempt the silly scruples of the poor virtuous man, whose conduct they now find so vastly preferable to their own!

But further: this inward self-displeasure and dislike will, in such cases, be greatly aggravated by the censure and upbraiding of the world, redoubled upon

them when they can bear it least. Sinners in distress are usually despised and condemned by their very tempters, and partners in sin. All, whom they have injured, will claim a right to insult them. Those, to whom they apply for assistance or comfort, will have a specious plea for disregarding and rejecting them. The generality will be eager to shew the superiority, some of their goodness, and some of their prudence, by reproaching them bitterly for their want of both. Even the best and best-natured persons, while they mourn over them, must remind them how unwise they have been: and on proper occasions mention them as warning to others. *Lo, this is the man, that made not God his strength, but strengthened himself in his wickedness.** Now think, I beg you, what must their feelings, amidst all this, be!

But, besides the shame of folly, they have a much worse kind to undergo, that of guilt, from the consciousness, that their behaviour hath been wrong and unworthy and of ill desert. For with what indifference soever many may affect to speak of this, all have at times, a sense of it extremely acute. Let any one ask his heart, what it thinks, when seriously disposed, of ingratitude for the being, which God hath bestowed on us, and the blessings, present and future, which he hath provided for us: of wilful and contemptuous disobedience to laws, so reasonable and beneficial, as he hath enjoined us; of scornfully slighting such offers of pardon and acceptance, as our blessed Redeemer hath purchased for us by his death, and made us in his Gospel; of neglecting the means appointed for our spiritual improvement, quenching the inward suggestions of our heavenly monitor, and *doing despite unto the spirit of grace.*† Let any one reflect what his de-

* Psal. lii. 7. † Heb. x. 29.

liberate sentiments are of falshood and treachery, of oppression and violence, of cruelty and implacability, of hard-heartedness and insensibility; what impressions it naturally makes on him to see innocence betrayed to ruin under pretence of tender affection, the peace and honour of families violated, or the due order of society destroyed, to gratify a lewd appetite; to see a rational creature degrade himself below a beast by intemperance, and abandon those to distress for whom he is bound by the strongest ties to make provision. How do these things look in others? how would they look to you, if you were the sufferer by them? Only remember therefore, that they are just the same, when you are the doer of them; and then say, if wickedness of every kind doth not abound in guilt and merit severe punishment.

Indeed hath not every sinner especially at his first entrance into sin, had powerful convictions of this truth: found that there were persons, whom he could not see without confusion and dismay; actions, which he could not think of, without hating himself? And what can make any one amends for being in such circumstances? He may hope indeed, that in time he shall get rid of these troublesome sensations; and may persuade himself, that afterwards he shall be in as good a condition, as if there were no ground for them. But surely most abandoned must they be, who can delight in such an imagination: who having once known what shame is, can be content to live on in a course of shameful actions, in hopes of losing by degrees the perception of which are so, and which otherwise. What should we think of a person, who after discerning clearly the despicableness of folly, should consent to be changed into an idiot, merely that he might play the fool without restraint from within; and should

fancy it to be comfort enough, that then he should not know the difference? Yet this man would be chiefly an object of pity: but the others, of utter detestation. And even this ignominious hope of theirs will certainly deceive them. For the faculty of moral reflection, conscience, is planted in us by our Maker for this very purpose, that we may approve or condemn ourselves, according as we act well or ill; and if our understandings be at all cultivated by education, it usually gains vigour enough to answer the purpose, and cannot easily be rooted out. Whether we will be the better for its admonitions, is in our own power; else we should not be free agents: but feel them we must. And the many contrivances which the vicious use to lay the sense of their vileness asleep, and the desperate resolutions which they frequently take when they cannot do it, are abundant proofs, how sharp the pain of guilty reflection may become.

Some indeed profligately boast of having got over it; and a few perhaps may; though not near so many, as will at times pretend they have. But what long and tormenting struggles must they probably have experienced first: and in how deplorable a state must the benumbing and stupefying of so important a principle of their nature have left them! The loss of bodily feeling and motion is but a faint image of it. And after all no one can be secure, that something may not still awaken this dormant power, when he least expects it. Some great and mortifying disappointment, some remarkable stroke of God's Providence, some alarming passage in his Word, some affecting discourse from the pulpit, some experimental confession of a fellow sinner, nay merely some instantaneous turn in his mind, for which it is impossible to account, may present on a sudden a most tremendous

view of himself to his own eyes: or some other person may be induced or provoked to lay his crimes in order before his face, perhaps before the world. And then, whatever ascendant he may have gained over his conscience before, imposing on it with specious colours, or calling off its attention from his past behaviour, yet then he will be forced to behold things as they are; and appear not only wretched and guilty to himself, but an object of abhorrence to others. Now general bad opinion is hard enough to be born, even when the mind is supported by innocence: but when infamy is accompanied with the conviction of deserving it, almost intolerable. For the feeling is not only dreadful in itself, but fills the soul with endless jealousies and suspicions, distracting horrors and fears, even of dangers the least probable. *Wickedness, condemned by her own witness, is very timorous; and being pressed with conscience, always forecasteth grievous things.** *The wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt: there is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked.*† Whose notice soever they escape, the very worst, the basest of their deeds lie constantly open to his view: and what *shame of face*‡ and dread of heart must that awful recollection excite!

Sometimes indeed these inward pangs drive men, as it was intended they should, to deep humiliation, to prayer for pardon, to laying hold on God's mercy through the merits of Christ, to zealous amendment, through the aid of the holy Spirit. And then it is doubtless happy to have felt them; but by no means to have committed the iniquity, that caused them: for an equally devout application to Heaven with a greater degree of inno-

* Wisd. xvii. 11. † Isa. lvii. 20. ‡ Ps. xliv. 15.

cence, would have been still more graciously received, and more bountifully rewarded: unless they to whom *many sins are forgiven, love much,** and work diligently in proportion; which many unquestionably have done: but who can promise himself that he shall do it, and shall be allowed to experience the joy of doing it? On the contrary, as the self-condemnation, which produced this mighty change must have been extremely painful during the accomplishment of it; so afterwards, and perhaps long afterwards, it may prove a burthen heavy enough to convince a very severe convert, that an early and continued obedience would have been much preferable to his truest repentance. And therefore, as most sinners endeavour to quiet themselves with a prospect of repenting some time or another, they ought most seriously to consider, what remorse and dejection they are treasuring up for themselves in the mean while, though they should do at last what such artful offenders have little cause to believe they ever shall. Observe but the case of those, to whom the text immediately relates. They were *made free from sin,* as the next verse tells us, they had *brought forth fruit unto holiness,* they were in the way to *everlasting life:* yet the Apostle calls their past faults, knowing doubtless what he said, *those things whereof ye are now ashamed.* And indeed let any one in the same condition say, whether his comforts are not often embittered, and his prospect clouded, by mortifying remembrances of his former transgressions: whether he hath not frequently returning doubts of God's forgiveness; whether he well knows how to forgive himself.

But very commonly shame comes at last to surround

* Luke vii. 47.

the sinner on all sides in such a manner, that he is ashamed to repent, though he perceives the necessity of it in the strongest light: and between his agitations of this kind, and the tyranny of his unlawful desires, authorised by habitual indulgence, he is reduced to the most lamentable state that the present life knows or can know: continuing the practice of wickedness with his eyes open to all its deformities and dangers: condemning and abominating himself for what he doth, yet going on to do, what he condemns and abominates.

Thus you see what internal, as well as external sufferings, naturally belong to irreligious courses. It must however be acknowledged, that, though always to be expected, they do not always arise to near the same height. For sometimes the worst of men continue in the most unaccountable prosperity, of health, circumstances, and even reputation. Sometimes also education, example, general custom, false reasoning, may in a considerable measure take off the shame of several sins, and give a sort, such as it is, of credit to them. Some persons likewise either have originally, or soon acquire, such an insensibility of heart or giddy thoughtlessness, that they do not undergo what others do, when they have acted amiss. And therefore, lest any possibility should remain to flatter any one, that he may be wicked, and yet escape what he deserves for it, the Apostle, to deter us effectually from sin, hath added in the text

III. The future punishment, that awaits it, *For the end of these things is death.*

That awful word is well known to signify, in many places of Scripture, a state of misery, as life doth of happiness. They are here placed in direct opposi-

tion: and the meaning evidently is what our Saviour elsewhere expresses; *These shall go away into everlasting punishment; but the righteous into life eternal**.

It might be very sufficient to determine the choice of man, that wickedness essentially tends to produce misery to its authors, and generally doth produce it, though now and then the case were to prove otherwise. But God is further concerned: and the attributes of his nature and the honour of his government require, that no one sinner shall ever have cause, upon the whole, to rejoice in his iniquities, and glory in his disobedience. If our Maker is allwise and almighty, he can provide for this: if he is just and holy, he will. For else this world of his would be ruled, as we ourselves can feel, and much more then must he, that it ought not. Possibly so minute a regard may appear to some, beneath him. But if it was not beneath him to create all things, it can never be so to conduct them to their proper end. If he superintends continually, as he doth, even the least part and movement of the material creation, can it be unfit for him to watch over the actions of rational beings? For what is there worthy of his attention, if they be not?

These considerations, confirmed by our inbred sense of the ill desert of wickedness, yet opposed again by instances of its seeming impunity, and by the frequent calamities of the good, raised in the minds of men, from age to age, perplexing doubts concerning the providence of God; to which however all other things around them gave full testimony. Sometimes they solved the difficulty, by discovering that the seeming happiness of the wicked was not real; sometimes by observing that it soon ended in great misery.

* Matth. xxv. 46.

Yet they were often forced to take refuge and intrench themselves in their general assurance of the divine justice; though when and how exercised, they knew not. But there being no appearance at all of a constant and proportionate exercise of it in this life, the wisest and best of them reasonably concluded, there must be another, designed to rectify whatever was wrong here. Yet a future and unseen state of existence, in which we were not to share, till our present frame was dissolved, had the look of an object too remote for human faculties to discern with certainty: so that many good men were tempted to question it; and those of an opposite character too easily brought themselves to disbelieve it. At least the convictions and presages of it, which they industriously stifled, had no uniform influence on their conduct. And therefore, after various intimations of this great truth given from above, to the earliest and following ages, for some confirmation of what reason suggested, God hath made it fully known to us christians that *he hath appointed a day in which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained:** *a day of wrath and revelation of his righteous judgment: when he will render to every man according to his deeds: to them that obey not the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, tribulation and anguish upon every soul of man that doth evil.*† So that now, to use the words of Job, *hell is naked, and destruction hath no covering*‡.

Here then is a consideration, before which all that can be said or imagined in favour of sin vanishes at once. And were it constantly as productive of pleasure and profit and esteem in the world, and as consistent

* Acts xvii. 31. † Rom. ii. 5, 6, 8, 9. ‡ Job xxvi. 6.

with peace in our own breasts, as it usually is the contrary, yet would not a moment's deliberation be necessary in order to renounce it. For what God will punish, never let man hope to be happy in.

The very apprehension of his punishing, the *fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation,** which no one, who believes in God and disobeys him, can possibly avoid long together, is enough to sour the very sweetest of unlawful enjoyments, and in the midst of mirth to sink the heart with heaviness. Let every sinner consult his own heart if it be not. Or how little soever he may feel or dread this at present, yet no one can tell how soon and how deep *the arrows of the Almighty* may be fixed *within him, the poison of them drink up his spirit* and *the terrors of God set themselves in array against him.*† Or could he go on speaking peace to himself through life, yet the approach of death may rouse him on a sudden from this dream, and croud such horrors into the small remainder of his days, as will far exceed the longest enjoyments of past sin; horrors accompanied with the insupportable aggravation, that so far as man can judge, they seize him too late to do good.

But what avails it, if the wicked could escape the previous fears of judgment itself, since they cannot escape the judgment itself? *For behold the day cometh, that shall burn as an oven, and all that do wickedly shall be stubble; and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of Hosts.*‡ As to the particulars of this punishment, curiosity is by no means the disposition it was intended to raise: and for the degree and duration of it, we are incompetent and partial judges of our own deserts, even in our most serious hours; and much less are we quali-

* Heb. x. 27. † Job vi. 4. ‡ Mal. iv. 1.

fied in the seasons of thoughtless gaiety, and bold self-confidence. God alone knows what is just and requisite: and from his declarations we must learn our fate; whose threatenings are in all respects as alarming as words can describe; and we may assure ourselves they will not be found vain terrors. Undoubtedly the sufferings of men will be as different hereafter, as their guilt is here. But whosoever shall sin presumptuously in hopes of a light punishment, will by that very punishment merit a heavy one. And who is able to conceive, to what the lowest degree may amount, of the misery that will then proceed, from the final and exemplary vengeance of omnipotence on impenitent offenders, from the bitter reflections of their own consciences on their folly and vileness, in first disobeying God, injuring their fellow-creatures, perverting themselves, then refusing the reconciliation which their Creator offered them, their Redeemer died to obtain for them, their Sanctifier was ready to apply to them; and lastly from the absence of all comfort and all hope in those regions *where their worm dieth not, and their fire is not quenched?** *For such are the dwellings of the wicked; and this is the place of him, that knoweth not God.*† *Can thy heart endure, or can thy hands be strong, in the day that I shall deal with thee? I the Lord have spoken it, and will do it.*‡

The subject is much too dreadful to be enlarged on farther: and it would ill become, did not the ministry committed to us require it, one sinner to denounce against another, terrors like these. Far be it from us to *make the heart of the righteous sad, whom God hath not made sad;*§ or affright the penitent, humble,

* Isa. lxvi. 24.—Mark ix. 44, 46, 48. † Job xviii. 21.
‡ Ezek. xxii. 14. § Ezek. xiii. 22.

vigilant believer with *devouring fire* and *everlasting burnings*,* instead of teaching them to rejoice and triumph, that *here is no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus*.† But whatever wilful or habitual transgressor, whatever person hitherto indifferent or inattentive to the state of his soul, at any time hears us, to him we must say, if there be any conviction of your danger awakened in your breast, do not suppress it, do not run away from it, do not suffer company, amusement or business to wear it off: but go, and in secret bewail yourself before God, earnestly beg pardon and grace for the merits of your crucified Redeemer, throw yourself entirely on the mercy freely offered in his name, firmly resolve, in confidence of his strength, not your own, against all sin, all imprudence, all negligence for the future; and recollect every day of your lives that solemn admonition: *Be not deceived: God is not mocked: whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth to his flesh, shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the spirit, shall of the spirit reap life everlasting*.‡

* Isa. xxxiii. 14. † Rom. viii. 1. ‡ Gal. vi. 7, 8.

SERMON XX.

GAL. vi. 10.

AS WE HAVE THEREFORE OPPORTUNITY, LET US DO GOOD UNTO ALL MEN: ESPECIALLY UNTO THEM, WHO ARE OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH.

WE are all born with a natural principle of love to our kind: we all see and feel the exercise of it to be fit and right: and the continual need, which we have, of the service and friendship of others continually reminds us to be serviceable and friendly in our turns. Were men universally so, the world would be as happy, as our endeavours can make it. And though it is not universally so, but far otherwise; yet whoever determines to practise this duty himself, let those around him do as they will, is sure to find his account in the course, which he takes. For he will generally acquire a large share in the esteem, and good offices of mankind; especially of those, whom he values: and he will always experience a delightful consciousness of intending well to them, and deserving well from them. But his chief advantage beyond comparison is, that if his kind actions proceed from a devout sense of God's commanding them; and humble trust in the aid of his Holy Spirit for performing them; and a lively faith in the merits of his blessed Son for the acceptance of them; he will then be intitled to the present protection and final approbation of his Maker and Judge: who hath declared, that

our treatment of our brethren shall be a principal rule, by which he will go in his treatment of us. The truth of these things is universally acknowledged: the inference, that we are most highly concerned to be mutually useful, is extremely evident: and yet of how very little use are most of us, compared with what we might be; and how much do we lose and suffer by our neglect!

The causes of so general a failure undoubtedly are various. Reciprocal provocations and resentments are both a powerful and a common one. Another, still more extensive, is, that wrong judged selfishness, which possesses men with such a blind eagerness for their own interest, that they cannot allow themselves to stay and think, in what it consists; and thus they fail of receiving, as well as communicating, the satisfaction, which a different conduct would produce. But besides these, others, by no means ill disposed towards their fellow-creatures, contribute much less to their benefit and comfort than they might, either from not observing how frequently occasions for it present themselves, or from not distinguishing rightly the proper objects of their humane intentions. And therefore it may promote considerably the practice of this duty, if we make some reflections, as the text leads us,

I. On the opportunites, which we have, of doing good.

II. On the choice of the persons, to whom we do it.

I. The opportunities. Now these are so many, of one sort or another, that some have understood the Apostle to speak here of our whole life, as one continued opportunity. And therefore, in the sentences before the communion, his words are translated,

While we have time, let us us do good unto all men. Life is the time allotted for this purpose. It must be for some end, that we are placed together in society: and it could not be for a worthier, than to copy and perfect in ourselves the image of our Maker, by cultivating and exerting a benevolent Spirit one towards another. We were purposely made so necessitous and mutually dependant, that means for the exercise of mutual goodness might never be wanting. And indeed scarce a single part of our behaviour is of so wholly an indifferent nature, but some of those about us will be, more or less, the better or the worse for it.

Consider, what unceasing opportunities there are of acting agreeably or disagreeably, even in the slightest intercourses of human life. One shall be, as the son of Sirach expresses it, *like a lion in his house*:* terrible to all who approach him, especially at times; and perhaps for no manner of reason; no good one, to be sure. Another shall be cold and dry, dark and distant: and perplex, as well as offend, such as have to do with him. A third, by the habitual or unseasonable melancholy of his looks and discourse, shall banish all comfort from the place, in which he lives or appears. How vastly preferable to this unsociable deportment is a behaviour of constant, universal humanity; a care to contribute, on every common occasion, to the peace and ease and innocent good humour of those with whom we converse!

Possibly such matters may be thought too inconsiderable to be mentioned in this place. But the Scripture hath mentioned them. *Courteousness* is expressly enjoined there.† *A merry heart doth good like a medecine.*‡ And indeed, far from being small things, they are very great ones. Many have so

* Ecclus iv. 30. † 1 Pet. iii. 8. ‡ Prov. xvii. 22.

tender a sensibility of mind, at least in respect of those, with whom they are nearly united by nature or choice, that the very happiness of their lives depends on their receiving gentle and affectionate and encouraging treatment. Again: the expectations of many concerning their most serious worldly interests are likely to succeed or fail, just according to the regard, that such or such a person hath for them: and therefore every minute alteration in his countenance or speech to them, makes a considerable one in their way of thinking of their own condition.

Nay, without any thing so particular, in all circumstances, unkind, or merely negligent behaviour gives men pain, and may do them further prejudice: while on the other hand, not only the more important evidences of good will support and revive the spirits, but the slighter expressions of it have no slight effects on those, to whom they are shewn. We commonly set about greater things with the temper, into which little ones put us. And therefore, if we come to them soured and disgusted, though perhaps it be owing to somewhat entirely unconnected with them, we shall be apt to judge unfavourably, to proceed in what lies before us with harshness, and be very different creatures from such, as nothing hath chanced to ruffle. It is also by repeated acts, that habits are acquired: and therefore, if we are often discomposed, though it be about trifles, the state of our minds will be gradually formed by the impression, which those trifles make. Besides great opportunities of exercising humanity fall, comparatively seldom, in our way: but these lower demonstrations of friendliness we can all give continually: so that were each of them singly of much less value than it is; yet frequent repetitions of them,

like a multitude of small sums, would swell the account beyond the imagination. And a further consideration still is, that many other instances of kindness only provide men with materials for the enjoyment of life; which they may have in plenty, and enjoy it scarce at all the better: whereas amicable and obliging demeanor adds directly to the enjoyment itself.

But I proceed now to our several opportunities of what is more usually called *doing good:* though indeed there would be little need of specifying them, if men would but attend to what passes in the world, with a view, which they ought. Where distresses and sufferings are so common, the occasions of preventing, or removing, or alleviating them, can seldom, if ever, be far from us. But our attention, for the most part is paid, not to those who want it, but from whom we can promise ourselves the most profitable returns for it. As to the afflicted and helpless, if we do not, what is too often done, take the advantage of insulting or oppressing them, at least we are extremely prone to avoid and slight them; though before their misfortunes, they had perhaps received many professions of respect and service from us, and possibly merited them by service done us. Yet we can make their difficulties the entertainment of our idlest conversation with perfect unconcern: be wondrous wise and happy in pointing out and aggravating their ill conduct: and if we do but drop an unmeaning declaration of being sorry for them; or gratify our spleen by censuring those who are more immediately bound to assist them, and yet omit it; then we think we have discharged our duty abundantly. Nay, even when the care of them belongs to us in particular, we can make false pleas of inability; or in-

vent, or however improve, little subjects of resentment against them, when all resentment, how well grounded soever, should be utterly forgotten, and lost in compassion.

While men are of such a disposition, no wonder if they see but a few opportunities of doing good. Nothing can make them visible, if we blind ourselves purposely. But let there *be first a willing mind,** and cases enough, God knows, too many, will present themselves, and call aloud for assistance. The need of study will be, not how to find out wants, but how to supply them. And yet, were we, besides taking notice of what forces itself upon us, to set apart now and then, a little time for considering wherein we could be helpful to any about us; or to enquire, if no occasion offered amongst them, where else we could meet with fit objects of benevolence, it would surely be nothing more, than the condition of human nature, the sympathy of man with man, and of Christian with Christian, recommends to us all.

It is very true most persons ought to fix their thoughts chiefly on their own business: and if they neglect that for the sake of serving others, may do great injustice to those, for whom they should be principally concerned, and soon come to want the help, which they go out of their way to give. But still there are many disengaged enough from private cares, to make the good of their neighbours their principal concern. And God who hath given them leisure for it, will expect it from them. Nay indeed sometimes, the more affairs men have upon their hands, the more ability they have on that very account, of being useful, in various methods, to their fellow-creatures. And

* 2 Cor. viii. 12.

whoever will keep the desire of doing good present always to his mind, will easily discern many more opportunities for it, than any one else can possibly point out to him.

It may however be expedient to mention some distinctly. But the particular advantages for this purpose, which persons of high rank, magistrates, parents, masters, teachers, or any others, have by virtue of their respective stations, though deserving their utmost regard, and too many for me to enumerate now: and therefore I shall only set before you some of the means, by which, independently of such relations, we may be serviceable to each other.

They, whom greater abilities, or closer attention, or more experience, have made better judges, either of the conduct of life in general, or of such and such affairs in it, must frequently have noble opportunities of directing the ignorant, and setting the mistaken right; of preventing the distresses of this world, and even the punishments of the next. Advice indeed, is too commonly given so as to produce little, if any, desirable effect: at improper times in a haughty and provoking manner, perhaps with a visible intention of only shewing our authority, or superior wisdom. And therefore it exasperates and hardens, instead of convincing and reclaiming. Nay, it may be feared, there are those, who had rather their counsel should not be followed; that they may triumph in publishing afterwards the ill consequences of disregarding it. But they, who really desire to do good in this way, and will apply themselves with any degree of that care to prevail with others, which we use in bringing them over to serve our own private interests, (and in truth, doing good is our most important interest) may

certainly discover many fit seasons and methods of recommending prudence, virtue, religion, to those with whom they converse.

Our opinion sometimes is directly and sincerely asked, in a point of consequence. Then it is barbarous to refuse it, and almost, if not quite, as bad, to give it with an artful reserve, concealing or disguising something material. But if men do not ask us: it may be, they know not whom to ask, or how it would be taken, or have not the courage, or possibly are proceeding wrong without suspicion. How excellent a charity now must it be, in any such case, to do another a most essential piece of service of one's own accord! Not every bystander indeed, who finds himself inclined to dictate, is authorized to intermeddle. But real well-wishers, who know the circumstances of an affair, and may have weight, should not be too backward; and, for fear of losing their labour, or possibly displeasing, suffer another, perhaps a friend, to fall into great inconveniences, which speaking a few words might have prevented, and secured his esteem and gratitude ever after. Nay, if prudent advice is not followed so soon, or so well, as might be wished; we ought not immediately to give up any one, either in anger or despair. Good sense will easily perceive, where there is no room left for hope: and till then, good nature will try on.

But indeed, when we have no opportunity of giving counsel to any particular person, who hath taken a wrong course, or is in danger of it; being careful to set the example of pious and virtuous and discreet behaviour, is giving the best counsel silently to all around us. And, if we do but join with it fit evidences, on fit occasions, of our approving, in others, innocence and beneficence, and disliking folly, wickedness, and im-

piety, *our light will so shine before men,* that we may justly hope some at least will be led by it to *glorify our Father, which is in Heaven,** and become happy here and hereafter.

A second very valuable and very amiable species of kindness is, expressing concern for the characters of those who are unjustly attacked. Every one must be sensible, how sadly detraction and calumny prevail in the world; how many things utterly false are related, and how currently believed; what aggravating circumstances are added, and invidious turns given to things in which there may be some truth, quite sufficient to alter the nature of them; and how much, not only of vexation, but mischief, is caused, both by the malicious and the wanton liberties, taken in this respect. Here then opens to us a large field of performing most useful and acceptable services one to another; which must, in the end, redound also to our own quiet and security; by shewing a general distaste of slander; and, where we can, the particular reasons for disbelieving it. For we ought no more to let the reputation, than the person, of any one be wounded, if we can prevent such cruelty. But, above all, we should contradict falsehoods, when we are known to be acquainted with the truth: else we shall be understood to confirm them. Indeed, opposition made to injurious reports, by some persons, at some times, especially of epidemical unreasonableness, may be to little purpose. But then it is the peculiar duty of such as have credit and influence, to stop the progress of such wickedness: not to let it go on, and secretly rejoice in it because it serves their turn; but honestly do justice to their keenest adversaries; and consider enmity, as a peculiar advantage for doing it effectually:

* Matth. v. 16.

because our testimony in their favour will be sure to obtain belief. And making this use of our situation will not only be truly Christian, and singularly generous; but the likeliest method, either of putting an end to the difference, which should always be our first view, or of continuing it, if it must continue, with great honour to ourselves.

A third way of being useful is, paying due regard to the worthy and able, wherever we find them: shewing countenance to such, instead of those who deserve or want it not: assisting them, when they set out with less favourable circumstances of friends or fortune, or cannot submit to the usual arts of advancing themselves, and are pushed back by the forward boldness of other competitors. Or, if we are not able to serve them ourselves, at least we may contribute to make their merit known: and particularly to such as can help them, and perhaps may be glad of their help: so that we may do a great kindness to both at once. And if such occasions do not offer, it may frequently be worth while to bestow some pains in search of them: not contenting ourselves with wishes in their behalf, when a moderate degree of diligence would procure them what we wish; nor counting the happiness of a deserving person so small a matter, and our own trouble so very great a one, as to make a difficulty of taking a few steps, that we should not have chosen else, when it may promote so desirable an end.

These, and others that might be mentioned, are unexpensive ways of doing good: which generally will enlarge, not restrain, our capacity of doing more. But the most usual notion of this duty is communicating of our plenty to supply the necessities of our poor brethren. And wealth may often be expended to the great benefit of others, yet at the same time, with no

mighty loss, if not a prospect of gain, to ourselves. For as the best method of relieving the able poor is employing them; so there are many, who, if they would contrive for it, might employ them to their own profit: as others might in such works, as would be conveniences, ornaments, and rational amusements. And so far as helping them to live comfortably is the real motive of these things, they are all real charities.

But supposing that we have no other way of doing good by laying out money, than what in strictness of speech is called alms; bestowing without expectation of any return from the receivers: there are very few, but can give in this manner, now and then, enough to be a most welcome relief to one or another of the wretched objects every where to be found. And many more than do, can afford frequent and large liberalities, of various kinds. Now these greatly mistake, if they imagine, that the duty of beneficence out of their worldly substance is sufficiently discharged by some small and almost insignificant distributions to the lowest part of the poor. As the providence of God hath placed different persons in different stations; whatever is truly requisite (for I speak not of such imaginary wants, as vanity and fancy frame;) but whatever is really needful to support men decently in the rank, which propriety obliges them to maintain, is nearly as necessary to them, as meaner accommodations are to others. And if they have much less, their difficulties and straits may be extremely pitiable: which is one thing, that merits the careful attention of the rich; especially with regard to their relations, friends, and dependants. But indeed we should all attend to every thing, from whence a claim upon us, either of mercy or of bounty can arise.

Many perhaps have not sufficient knowledge of par-

ticular persons in distress to bestow amongst them so much as they ought to bestow in charity. But it is easy for them to find those, who have. And if they are unwilling, though it must be without reason, to trouble or even to trust such; there are public charities of various kinds, in any of which, both the smallest and the largest sums may be undoubtedly well employed.

It is true, extending our bounty so wide may cramp our other expences: and possibly so much the better. It may prevent or lessen the increase of our fortunes; but that may well happen, without the least harm done us. What we have no occasion for, and probably never shall, can be of no value to us. And therefore, as it is impossible, that men should for ever have occasion to lay up still more for their families, there must be multitudes to whom parting with what will make many of their fellow-creatures lastingly happy, is in effect parting with nothing. But where it is something, and even much; surely the consideration, for which we part with it, the good of one or more of our brethren, is a very just and weighty one: besides that our own good is most deeply concerned in it, as I hope you have seen. Indeed, had we no other inducements to acts of charity, it would be adviseable to do frequently such as are adapted to our abilities, were it only to prevent the love of money from fixing and growing upon us, and to mortify that wretched craving for more, by withdrawing from it part of its food.

But all motives of worldly prudence in favour of any kind of beneficence, are infinitely weaker, than those by which religion invites us to every kind: the love, the example, the command of our Maker and Redeemer: enforced by the assurance, that we are

then employing most wisely our thoughts, our time, and our property, when they are spent in the most judicious endeavours, that we can use, to serve and benefit any part of mankind; and are then most effectually securing our own interest for ever, when we shew the most affectionate and extensive concern for the interests of those around us, in proportion to the importance of each. *As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men. And let us not be weary in well-doing: for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.**

* Gal. vi. 9.

SERMON XXI.

GAL. vi. 10.

AS WE HAVE THEREFORE OPPORTUNITY, LET US DO GOOD UNTO ALL MEN: ESPECIALLY UNTO THEM, WHO ARE OF THE HOUSEHOLD OF FAITH.

IN discoursing on these words, I have already shewn, what various opportunities we have, of promoting the happiness, and preventing, removing, or alleviating the afflictions of our fellow-creatures: by the good nature and courtesy of our common behaviour to them; by information and counsel occasionally given them; by a due concern for their characters and reputations; by our countenance, favour, and interest; and, if their condition require it, by assisting them with our substance also.

I proceed therefore at present, as I originally proposed, to shew you

II. Who are the proper objects of our kindness.

Now concerning this, the only general rule undoubtedly is that of the text: *Let us do good unto all men.* He, who hath *created us in his own image,** *is loving unto every man; and his mercy is over all his works.*† *He maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust.*‡ We ought therefore to approve ourselves *the children of the highest,* by being *merciful, as our*

* Gen. i. 27. † Psal. cxlv. 9 ‡ Matth. v. 45.

*Father also is merciful:** and whatever station the wisdom of his providence hath allotted us, fill up the sphere of our influence, be it greater or less, with acts of kindness. The affection of benevolence was planted in us, and the exercise of it enjoined us, not for the advantage of some few particulars, but of all human kind: and whoever is capable of being the better for us, ought to be the better; if we can make him so, without neglecting others, who have stronger claims upon us.

In many cases, which I have mentioned to you, doing the most important service to one person, will not at all diminish our ability of doing as great to others. Communicating of our property indeed will: and here we are not to understand our Saviour's precept, *give to every man that asketh of thee,*† in the utmost extent of the words, any more than several other of his precepts. *Giving to every one* thus, unless it were so little as to be of no use, would soon disable us from giving to any one; indeed from supporting ourselves. And therefore his meaning must be only, that no person should be excluded; either out of selfishness, which is a common fault, or out of malignity, as the Samaritan woman at first would have excluded him for being a Jew‡, and as many of the Jews excluded the heathens for being idolaters; but that we should extend our beneficence to all of all sorts, on proper occasions, as far as can be reasonably expected.

Suppose therefore an entire stranger to apply for our charity: if the law provides a method, as in this nation it doth, by which the truth of his complaint may be examined, and relief granted him, in case it proves to be true; directing and referring him to that, will, ordinarily speaking, be sufficient; and doing more

* Luke vi. 35, 36. † Luke vi. 30. ‡ John iv. 9.

will encourage idle vagrants and cheats. But if the legal provision doth not reach to his case; or if the officers intrusted with it are so hard-hearted as to reject him; (which is too frequent;) and we have means to find out, and leisure to inquire, whether he wants help; and have cause to think he doth, and are able to give it him; it is relation enough to us, that he is of the same nature with us; and recommendation enough, however unacquainted with him we were before, that his necessities have brought him to our acquaintance now.

Suppose farther, that such a one is of a different party, a different country, a different religion, from our own; these things ought to be no bar in the least to any needful good offices from us: and we shall do the more honour to the party, the country, the religion, of which we are, the more tender compassion we shew him.

Farther still: let persons have done us injuries; let those injuries be as great as we think them, though they seldom or never are in reality: yet they remain human creatures, which alone requires of us humanity towards them; and we have perhaps also injured them; at least in other instances we have offended both God and man; and ought to forgive, as we hope to be forgiven.

If indeed any unnecessary kindness will certainly, or in all likelihood, produce harm upon the whole; whatever appearance of good nature, friendship, generosity, it may wear; we must remember it is a false appearance, and abstain from it as immoral. But otherwise the rule is, to do service gladly to every one of our fellow-creatures.

Not that we are bound to do them equal service. Their titles to it may be very unequal: and where

there is a difference, we ought to make one. Nor, be that of any one ever so strong, should we so exhaust ourselves upon any single object, as to leave nothing for others, which in the common course of things must fall in our way, and may deserve at least as much notice. But then, on the other hand, we must not reject those, who need assistance now, under pretence of reserving ourselves for worthier petitioners hereafter; be always waiting for a fitter occasion than the present, and perhaps never find it: an artifice, which it may be feared, some have employed. Indeed, evasions are easily invented, in this whole matter of doing good, by those who seek for them. And all, that the teachers of religion have in their power towards preventing it, is, first to remind men, that every one's true interest consists not in fencing against his duty, and getting rid of it, but in learning and performing it; then to state the grounds, which different sorts of claimants have to look for kindnesses from them: and so leave it, both to the benevolent and the selfish, to shew what they are, and take the consequences.

The first and usually strongest claim is proximity of kindred. They who are nearly related to us, belong immediately to our care. Others have a care of the same kind, incumbent on them. And the good of the whole is best secured by the due attention of every one to his own part. Accordingly God hath interwoven in our nature powerful instincts, which admonish us continually of this obligation: and yet hath admonished us of it again by express words of Scripture. *If any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.** But then it

* 1 Tim. v. 8.

must be observed, that *providing* plainly appears from the context, and from the use of the word in other places, to mean in this, not, laying up for them without end still more and more, which is often no duty at all; but, maintaining them properly out of what we have, which is always an important duty. And even, where both these things are needful, both may be done; and much room left, in large fortunes especially, for acts of beneficence to others. But here now is one instance, how easy it is to make plausible excuses for neglecting plain precepts. What plea can look fairer, than making provision for those who are united to us by blood or affinity? And who can fix the bounds of that provision for another person's family? Yet bounds there are, beyond which we cannot really increase their happiness; nay, beyond which we ought not to consult their interests. The duty of taking care to put them in good circumstances is but one of many, concerning the disposal of our income: and if it be carried farther than is fairly consistent with the rest, great wickedness may be committed under colour of it, and often hath been.

Another ground of preference in doing good is friendship: which indeed we are not bound to contract with any one: but when it is contracted, (and we find our Saviour himself had his beloved disciple) the ties of it are by no means to be disregarded. Friendship, when strict, comprehends a tacit agreement and covenant between those who enter into it, to look upon the concerns of each other in a great measure as their own. Mere intimacy of acquaintance is a lower sort of friendship. Cultivating both sorts by mutual kind offices contributes very much to the enjoyment of life: and may contribute to the improvement of each party in knowledge and goodness, as

well as to the advancement of their worldly prosperity. Others, it must be supposed, have their own friends zealous for them: and we are to have a proper zeal for ours. Not but that one, who was unknown to us before, may often, if his merit or want be considerably greater, justly expect, that we should give him the preference. And it is no less blameable, than common, to promote the interests of those, with whom we are connected, beyond reasonable bounds: raising them to stations, perhaps of consequence, for which they are not qualified; and depressing, for that end, others, who have pretensions far better founded. Such friendships are plain confederacies against equity and public good. And if this be true, even in the case of real and well chosen friends, much more strongly doth it hold in that of mere favourites, whom we have adopted from arbitrary fancy, or liking to their obsequious behaviour. For indeed worthy characters will seldom condescend to the meannesses requisite for gaining and preserving immoderate degrees of fondness. But were that otherwise, private partialities ought never to take place of reason and justice. When they do, it is false good nature and gross iniquity.

A third title to peculiar regard, is that which persons acquire by having done us favours. We are in strictness the debtors of those to whom we have obligations: and should always be contriving to make as prompt payment, with as large interest, as possible. It is perhaps one of the heaviest discouragements to useful and kind actions and undertakings, that a suitable return for them is so seldom made. The hopes of gratitude prompt even the selfish to many obliging deeds, of which they would not otherwise have thought. And the exercise of gratitude propagates and multiplies new kindnesses continually. We should

therefore treasure it in our memories, that if the inequality of other circumstances be not very considerable, we are always to do good, where we have received it. Yet still, when there would be any shocking impropriety in this, we must excuse ourselves for the present, and make the speediest and fullest amends, that we can, some other way.

But besides those, who have a right to the especial notice of some, there are others peculiarly intitled to the compassion of all.

And the first rank of these consists of such, as the Scripture calls, in a spiritual sense, *wretched and miserable, and poor and blind and naked*:* who are wholly or nearly destitute of Christian faith and hope, and ignorant of the indispensible rules of life. Multitudes there are of such, evenin this enlightened nation: and multitudes more, who can scarce help knowing their duty, live in almost a total disregard to it. Now their case is the sadder, as it gives little concern to the generality of other persons, and perhaps none at all to themselves. Yet *their feet go down to death, their steps take hold on Hell.*† Therefore, as parents are chiefly bound to see, that there be none such amongst their children; masters and mistresses, to look after them in their families, and ministers in their parishes; so all people are bound in proportion to think, what they can do likewise towards *causing the glorious light of the Gospel to shine into the hearts of men.*‡

Of temporal claims to the kindness of all without distinction, the principal constant one is undoubtedly that of poverty: especially when sickness or losses happen, or work is scarce, or seasons rigorous, or provisions dear, and many mouths to be filled. They

* Rev. iii. 17. † Prov. v. 5. ‡ Cor. iv. 4, 6.

indeed who prefer an idle and vagabond life of beggary before honest labour, ought not to be encouraged in it by relief, but abandoned to the wretchedness, which they chuse. The law of God passes sentence on them, *If any one will not work, neither let him eat*:* and the law of the land corrects them justly for the needless weight which they hang upon society. Nay, such as cannot now labour, if they have brought themselves into straits by debauchery, negligence or extravagance, though they must have some, yet it should be a sparing maintenance, unless deep repentance plead in their favour. But the distresses of those, who are brought low without their own fault, and have striven to support themselves as long as they could, should be alleviated with the tenderest pity. Especially if they be friendless, as well as helpless, this makes the height of a compassionable case. A man in this situation may nominally have many and able friends; yet if they will take no competent care of him, he is to be considered as really having none: and their neglecting him is far from being a reason, why others should do so likewise.

We may indeed alledge, to excuse our parsimony towards the poor, that we are afraid of impostures, and of throwing away our charity. But then why will we not, where there is any likelihood of truth, make inquiry? Believing every one, to be sure, is feeding the unworthy with what the deserving ought to have. But resolving to disbelieve every one is a mean contrivance to spare our money, which both God and man will see through. Very possibly, after our best care, we may sometimes be deceived. But the more danger there is that many of our endeavours to do good may fail, the more care we ought to use, that

* 2 Thess. iii. 10.

some part however may succeed: imitating the wisdom of the husbandman, who commits to the earth perhaps more than double of the corn than he expects to bear fruit: and observing, that under a similar image, the Scripture hath expressly given this very injunction. *In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not, whether shall prosper, either this or that; or whether they both shall be alike good.** But one thing we certainly know, that all attempts, directed by our best judgment to the benefit of others, will at least benefit ourselves. For they will improve in us by exercise a merciful disposition; and recommend us to his approbation, who graciously accepts the will for the deed.

Every way of doing good hath some advantage, peculiar to itself: but relieving the distressed poor hath many considerable ones. Uneasiness is much more strongly felt, than satisfaction; and therefore taking away pain is making a greater change for the better, than adding pleasure. Besides, there is oftener room for it: and it is commonly sooner done, and at less expence. Bestowing what would scarce make one in moderately good circumstances happier at all, would give comfort and joy to great numbers of the indigent. And further still the sufferings of the poor are true and real: the wants of others are frequently imaginary, and on several accounts unfit to be supplied.

But though poverty, I mean when joined with sobriety and industry, hath the strongest title to our regard; yet the two latter alone, though accompanied with no distress, greatly merit countenance and favour. Frugality and diligence in a lawful calling are

* Eccl. xi. 6.

hopeful marks of an honest mind. And it would be very hard, that they, who do their best, should, for want of encouragement, fail to thrive and rise: especially considering, that, while they labour for themselves, they labour for the public too.

These good qualities are yet more deserving of notice when they are adorned by knowledge and skill. For not only every thing valuable ought to have its value properly acknowledged; but preferring persons of less abilities to others of greater, may occasion many to suffer by their ignorance: and it disheartens men from attempts of excelling, to which they should always be excited.

But the highest sort of merit, beyond comparison, is that which the Apostle singles out in the text to recommend by the expression of *the household of faith.* All good Christians, being through the grace of God conformed to his likeness, and adopted by him to be heirs of salvation, are therefore, when taken separately, called the children of their heavenly Father; when jointly, his family or household. And there being no admittance into this family, or continuance in it, but by such a belief of religion, as produces an uniform practice of it, therefore it is called *the household of faith.*

And one reason for directing the primitive Christians to do good, especially to their brethren in the faith, probably was, because the generality of them were of the poorer sort, and yet were least likely to meet with assistance from others: their heathen neighbours being offended by the singularity of their notions, and condemned by the strictness of their lives: on which account it was very needful, that the

rich members of their own communion should consider them in the first place.

But another main reason doubtless was, that Christians were, what the design of Christianity is to make them, more religious and virtuous than other men, and therefore bound to treat one another as being so. They were to prefer a fellow-believer in their benefactions, not only for belonging to the same body, but because *the righteous is more excellent than his neighbour.** And this points out a way for us also, though *the household of faith,* in outward profession and appearance, is of equal extent with our country, to observe however the spirit and intent of the Apostle's precept, by making it one great rule of all our charities, to be most liberal to the truest Christians; that is, the most pious and virtuous and honest persons. In this sense his direction is so extremely reasonable and important, that the heathen emperor Julian, writing, 300 years after, to the heathen high priest of these very Galatians, to whom this epistle is written, could not forbear inserting it in words so nearly the same, that there can be no doubt, from whom the thought was borrowed. *Let us therefore,* saith he, *communicate of our substance to all men, but more freely to those of good minds.*† And certainly nothing can be more judicious.‡ Every

* Prov. xii. 26.

† Κοινωνητεον ουν των χρηματων ἁπασιν ανθρωποις· αλλα τοις μεν επιεικεσιν ελευθεριωτερον τοις δε αποροις ὡ πενησιν, ὁσον επαρκεσαι τη χρειᾳ. p 290. Ed. *Spanh.* Though επιεικεσι may seem opposed to αποροις, and therefore to signify what sometimes *honesti* doth in *Latin,* and *the better sort* in *English;* yet I find not, that it hath that sense. And *Julian,* a little before, saith we must not neglect τους πενητας, αλλως τε οταν ὡ επιεικεις τινες τυχωσι τον τροπον. And *Arist.* Rhet. l. 1. c. 2. §. 3. uses επιεικης for a good man, and επ εικεια for a worthy character.

‡ Donabit [sapiens] aut bonis, aut eis quos facere poterit bonos. Donabit cum summo consilio, dignissimos eligens. Sen. de vita beat. c. 23. where, and c. 24. see more.

kind of distinction ought to have a proportionable regard shewn it: and therefore the highest and most honourable ought to have the greatest. The private prudence of acting thus, though a selfish reason, deserves mention: that whoever assists a worthy person, may be sure to have the favour gratefully received; and as far as possible, repaid: whereas on others there is no dependance. *When thou wilt do good,* saith the son of Sirach, *know to whom thou doest it: so shalt thou be thanked for thy benefits. Do good to the godly man, and thou shalt find a recompence: and if not from him, yet from the most high.** For *God, who* to speak in the language of St. Paul, *is the Saviour,* the preserver and benefactor, *of all men, but especially of those that believe,*† expects us to imitate him, not only in the universality of his beneficence, but in the peculiar notice, which he takes of the fittest objects of it. And accordingly we find, that this was the deliberate, solemn resolution of the Psalmist. *O my soul, thou hast said unto the Lord, thou art my God. My goodness extendeth not to thee: but to the saints that are in the earth; even to those, who excel in virtue; in whom is all my delight.*‡

It is one of the oldest complaints in the world, that no sufficient difference is made between the good and bad in the distribution of happiness. And though it belongs only to the great Judge of all to remedy this evil completely, as he will at the last day, yet we should every one contribute our utmost to lessen it in the mean time. Not only the interest of religion requires it of us, but that of mankind; who will always be miserable in proportion as they are wicked: and it is encouraging wickedness, not to encourage virtue. This neglect, in those who have power and

* Ecclus xii. 1, 2. † 1 Tim. iv. 10. ‡ Ps. xvi. 2, 3.

influence, produces unspeakable mischief: and in all ranks downwards, it must be of far greater consequence, than is generally apprehended, to lay hold on every opportunity of shewing, that we respect and will befriend worthy characters, and think no obligation superior to that of supporting piety and morals, in this manner.

Thus I have gone through the chief claims, that can be made to our regard in doing good. The more of them unite in one person, the stronger his pleas become: and if, at any time, being divided between several, they make the rule of our conduct seem dubious; let us only take care to preserve an impartial desire of acting rightly, and we shall make few, if any, mistakes of great importance. *The integrity of the upright shall guide them: and the righteousness of the perfect shall direct his way.** Most of our difficulties about the best sorts, and fittest objects, and requisite proportions of beneficence, arise, it may be feared, not so often from real ignorance or doubt, as from unwillingness. Let us all therefore endeavour first to conquer that, by reflecting seriously on the many and strong motives, that urge us *to do good and to communicate*:† let us form our minds, with the most assiduous care, to a temper of universal benevolence and love, not to be exercised now and then only, on extraordinary and distant occasions, but to animate the whole of our behaviour to each other. To the exactest vigilance over ourselves, let us join our most ardent prayers to God, that his Holy Spirit, for the sake of his blessed Son, may quicken, restrain, direct us: and then let us chearfully go on our way: where the case is plain, follow the

* Prov. xi. 3, 5. † Heb. xiii. 16.

dictates of an honest heart without hesitation: where it seems perplexed, judge as well as we can, without scruple or terror. For we serve a most gracious Master: and so long as we serve him with a sincerely right intention, we shall probably seldom err from our duty, and certainly never fail of our reward.

SERMON XXII.

MATTH. v. 6.

BLESSED ARE THEY, WHICH DO HUNGER AND THIRST AFTER RIGHTEOUSNESS: FOR THEY SHALL BE FILLED.

WHATEVER objections the vain or vicious make against religion, they must allow, if they have any regard to truth remaining, not only that nothing else promises happiness hereafter, but that nothing is so likely to give happiness even here, as that disposition of mind, to which religion proposes to bring us. For he, who loves God sincerely, and obeys him willingly, and trusts in him cheerfully; who delights in doing justice and shewing goodness to his fellow-creatures; and takes pleasure in regulating his conduct by the dictates of reason and Scripture; studying to be useful in his station, and keeping his heart shut against every hurtful indulgence, while he opens it in a proper degree to every innocent gratification, hath unquestionably the truest enjoyment of his being, that is possible. He destroys not his health by intemperance, nor his fortune by extravagance, nor his character by criminal or mean behaviour. He generally obtains esteem and friendship from others; and he always feels the most comfortable testimony of his own conscience. Whatever he denies himself, or parts with, it is for a valuable consideration, the discharge of his duty: whatever he suffers, he escapes the greatest of evils, remorse and

shame; and he enjoys the greatest good, a conscious sense of the divine favour, conducting him graciously through the afflictions of this life to an endless felicity in the next, that shall be the more abundant for them: and where shall we find upon earth a securer, an easier, a more joyful situation? Right actions, it must be owned, are often accompanied, in the beginning of a Christian course, with great inward struggles. But they diminish continually, in proportion as a right temper is formed: and when we arrive at a proper maturity in goodness, we shall be intirely free from difficulties, and absolutely at peace.

But then it is objected, that allowing such a state to be ever so happy, we have no prospect of attaining it in a sufficient measure to afford us any feeling of that happiness. And experience is imagined by too many to confirm this apprehension. Most of those who live either in vice or neglect of piety, make at one time or another warm resolutions, and, it may be, vigorous attempts, to throw off wrong habits and become religious. But they find it an unpleasing, laborious, painful work. And let them endeavour as earnestly as they will; nay, be ever so much persuaded for a while, that they have gained considerable ground; they are very liable to relapse, more or less, into their former transgressions or omissions, contrary to all their hopes. Daunted at this, they draw immediately a hasty conclusion, that nature is not to be altered, and custom is second nature: that it would be well for them indeed, if they had that command of themselves, that some have: but how much soever they may envy them, they must of force be content with their own condition; for it signifies nothing to strive against what they shall never get the mastery of, or aspire to what they shall never arrive at. And so

they sit down satisfied with this plea, lay aside the thought of growing better, and then of course grow continually worse. Yet plainly if endeavouring would prevent that only, it would be worth while: for, next to being good, being as little bad as we can, is our evident interest, with respect to both worlds.

But we may justly hope for much more. And that we may not doubt of it, our Saviour hath assured us of it. In the very beginning of his sermon on the mount he lays it down; '*Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.* Whoever truly desires to become pious and virtuous, and pursues that great point in the right method, with due perseverance, shall never fail of attaining his end. And the whole Word of God teaches the same thing. Why then should we not believe it, and act on that belief? If we act without it indeed; our attempts will be as faint as our hopes. But *this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.** Not a presumptuous faith in ourselves alone: that will certainly deceive us; and is the very cause, that so many fall to their utter ruin, when they thought they stood firmest: but a trust and reliance on the promised grace of God, through him who died to obtain for us power as well as pardon; a fixed persuasion, that *we can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth us:* which he doth by a double assurance, of present help, as well as a future reward. This help he hath expressly engaged to every Christian, in every difficulty, on the reasonable terms, of humbly praying for it, and honestly making use of it. What should hinder us then from *working out our own salvation,* when God is ready to *work in us*

* 1 John v. 4.

both to will and to do;* both good desires, and the accomplishment of them? Our bad inclinations may be too hard for us: but not for him. He will certainly qualify us for what he commands and expects: else his precepts would be mockery, and his punishments cruelty.

But still it is alledged by many, that in fact, though they do both endeavour and pray, they cannot become good, even in their outward behaviour; much less in their hearts. And perfectly good we do not say they can become at present: but why not sufficiently to enjoy from it much peace and comfort? Let us examine the pretended impossibility of this a little more distinctly. It is confessed, our spiritual frame is weak, and was grievously disordered by the fall. But however, though *in our flesh*, to use the words of the Apostle, *dwelleth no good thing*, yet *after the inward man we delight in the law of God*.† Through his mercy we have still right and worthy principles, as well as wrong and bad ones. We have still dispositions in our breasts, to esteem and honour goodness, to be grateful for benefits, to observe the commands and submit to the disposal of a just, wise, and kind superior. Now these, directed to their properest object, Almighty God, are love, obedience and resignation to him, in which consists a spirit of religion. We have also by nature, not only tender affections in the nearer relations of life, but a general sense and approbation of honesty and truth, of good-will, pity, and forgiveness towards all with whom we have to do: and these things comprehend our duty to our neighbour. Then, as to what we owe to ourselves: reasonable creatures must think reason ought to be followed, rather than passion and appetite; must condemn the excesses,

* Phil. ii. 12, 13. † Rom. vii. 18, 22.

that destroy their understanding or health; and be shocked at violations of decency and modesty. So that, in truth, we have the seeds within us of every thing good, as well as evil. And all we need is, to cultivate the one, and pluck up the other, and we are what we should be. It is acknowledged, we have not strength of our own to root out our vices: and our virtues will never bear fruit, without kindly influences from above. But since God is ready to give us all we really want, we may labour with full as much assurance of succeeding, as if we had it of our own.

There are instances, but too many, of persons bringing themselves into habits contrary to reason and nature: why should it be impossible to acquire such, as agree with both? We can abstain from faults, for which we have ever so great a love, when our interest requires it, when some favourite pursuit or fancy is served by it. This cannot therefore, in general, be extremely difficult: for very often the motive of such self-denial is trifling enough. And why do we then persuade ourselves, that love of God and our duty, and hope of eternal happiness, and fear of eternal misery, cannot have an equal influence upon us? The truth is, we need but try heartily, and we shall find it can; shall find that we are able by a firm resolution, founded on faith in Heaven, to abstain from any one sinful action whatever: and therefore, by repeating the resolution, from any number of such actions.

Indeed merely restraining the outward acts of vice is not being virtuous: virtue consists in the inward disposition of the heart. But a course of such restraints uniformly carried on with that view, will as certainly, in time, change our dispositions in this respect, as we see it doth in all others. We grow contented, and pleased, by degrees, with every place, and every way

of life, we are put into: and become fond at last, of what we were once quite indifferent about; nay, of what we disliked very much. But besides the general force of custom, there is a peculiar complacency, connected by our Maker with the performance of our duty; which the longest habit of sin, cannot so intirely extinguish, but that, whenever we return to the right way, our heart will applaud us for every step we take; joyful prospects will open to us, and invite us on through every difficulty; till at length we shall get beyond them, and find *the ways of wisdom pleasantness; and all her paths, peace.**

Perhaps this may not be so soon, as we could wish or expect. Yet, not uncommonly, God meets the very first advances, that he hath inclined men to make towards him, and changes their hearts almost totally at once. But be it ever so long, what have we else to do, but go on and wait his time? Attaining a religious state of mind is not a matter, at which one would aim only if it could be acquired in a short space, and with little trouble. It is the great, the one thing that we have to be concerned about in life: what must be done, or we are miserable; and if once done well, makes us happy for ever. Therefore, how slow or how difficult our progress may be, is little to the purpose: we should go on with more pleasure indeed, if we went on faster and smoother: but our business is, to go on as we can. And whoever hath strength enough to make a stand, may quickly have enough to gain ground; and, by pursuing his advantage, will undoubtedly at length get a complete victory.

I am very sensible, how often this fails to be the case. But the reason is: either men do not set about reforming themselves with the sincerity, the spirit and

* Prov. iii. 17.

the prudence, that they do about other points of importance; or they have not patience to persist in it.

Most people, far from wishing to mend their faults, are very unwilling to know that they have any. Now what can be the meaning of this? In all other employments, whoever is desirous to do well, examines carefully into the defects of his own work, receives with thankfulness the judgment of his friends, turns to use even the censures of his enemies; and from whencesoever the knowledge of any imperfection comes, hath no quiet, till he hath corrected it to the best of his power. But is it thus we act in the government of our hearts, and the conduct of our lives? If not, whence comes the difference? Doubtless from hence, that we are not so sincere in one case, as the other. It is not *righteousness*, piety, and virtue, that we *hunger and thirst after*; but a fair shew, even though it be a false one, to others and ourselves. We have small regard to what promotes not this: and what lessens it, we consider only as an injury and a loss; not at all as an opportunity given us of reforming and improving our hearts and lives, notwithstanding that we profess the strongest desire of it.

But suppose a person ever so desirous to conquer some vices, yet if he indulge others; or suppose he endeavours to get rid of all immoralities, yet if he allow himself in profaneness or forgetfulness of God, his aim is inconsistent, and he must not hope to succeed. Every virtue is connected with every other virtue: all virtue is connected with religion: and they will not flourish apart. Specious appearances there may be: but not useful realities. We must *hunger and thirst after* universal *righteousness*, not one part only, if we expect to be filled from above.

Nay though we should wish to grow better in all respects, yet wishing it faintly, and attending to it slightly, will never effect it. If we make riches, or power, or pleasure, or any thing else of this world, our great aim; and look upon the religious and moral government of ourselves as an inferior matter; not to be overlooked indeed, but requiring only so much regard, as these more important affairs will admit; our improvement in it will be very little, if any at all: *For we cannot serve two* Masters.* But did we once see, and will keep in mind, that piety and virtue are our business here; that forming our hearts to a practical esteem of reason and truth, to a temper of justice and goodness towards men, of reverence and obedience to God, of love to Christ, of joy in the Holy Ghost, is our main concern, compared with which every thing else is nothing: it would make a wonderful difference, both in our diligence and our success.

But still the greatest diligence may fail, unless we proceed in a proper method. If we resolve against sin; and will not resolve to be on our guard against the things, that lead us into it: If we desire to *grow in grace*;† and will not use the means, which God hath appointed for our growth in it: what wonder is it, that we fail? Nay, though we take the rightest methods imaginable, and proceed in them, for a time, with the greatest spirit: yet if, after a while, we become *wearied, and faint in our minds*,‡ and leave off; all our past labour will be in vain. We cannot indeed keep to the same pitch constantly: but whenever the want of it hath betrayed us into a fault, we can recover and raise ourselves up to it again. And though a fresh repetition of the same fault were to succeed

* Matth. vi. 24. † 2 Pet. iii. 18. ‡ Heb. xii. 3.

often; yet, recollection and fresh resolution may be repeated as often, till through the grace of God they become effectual.

But here people usually object; they cannot resolve against sin more strongly, than they have done; yet their former resolutions have stood them in no stead: and to what purpose is it to make more! Now every one sees, how absurd this way of thinking would be in the affairs of common life. Scarce any one succeeds at the first trial, usually not till after many trials, in almost any thing they go about to learn. And yet what do they do? They endeavour on: and though perhaps they cannot possibly be more in earnest at last, than they were at first, yet insensibly, themselves know not how, they overcome the difficulty so intirely, that very often neither any feeling, nor any notion of it remains.

Let us therefore imitate their perseverance; and not be impatient, and out of hopes, because of a few failures: always think lowly of what we have done: but always highly of what through God's help, we may do. Being uneasy at our past miscarriages, is indeed a duty, so far as it teaches us to be humble, to ask pardon, and strive to behave better. But if we do nothing but dwell upon and aggravate our fault to our own minds; till we have so little opinion of, and so little liking to, ourselves, that we have no heart to set about amendment; a sensibility, thus excessive, defeats its own end; and becomes a new sin, added to all the former.* We must therefore never despair, and give up our case as incurable, and our souls as lost: for they are not so. God is our physician; and

* Πρωτον μεν καταγνωθι των γινομενων· ειτα καταγνους, μη απογνως σεαυτȣ·—αλλα μαθε το των παιδοτριβων· Πεπτωκε το παιδιον; Αναςας, φησι παλιν παλαιε, μεχρις αν ισχυροποιηθης. Θελησαι δει, ȣ γεγονε.—ὡρ παλιν απονυςαξαι, ȣ απολωλεν. *Arrain Epict.* l. 4. c. 9. versus finem.

no disease is too inveterate for him. We have only to study and follow his directions faithfully, and the final event is infallible. If we fail in our duty; we may, if we will, from that very failure, get more strength and skill for the future: by observing, through what wrongness or weakness in our temper, what rashness or negligence in our conduct, the advantage against us was gained: and thinking, what precautions will be most effectual against another trial. A moderate share of time and pains, honestly spent thus, would give us happy earnests of obtaining at length an entire conquest: which however, though always possible, will be much the easier and surer, the earlier we prepare for and engage in the conflict; before we give the enemy leisure to strengthen himself, by further weakening and corrupting us. *My son, gather instruction from thy youth up: so shalt thou find wisdom till thine old age. Come unto her as one that ploweth and soweth, and wait for her good fruits: for thou shalt not toil much in labouring about her, but shalt eat of her fruits right soon.—My son, if thou wilt, thou shalt be taught: and if thou apply thy mind, thou shalt be prudent.—Let thy mind be upon the ordinances of the Lord, and meditate continually in his commandments: He shall establish thine heart, and give thee wisdom at thine own desire.**

But supposing the worst, that we have been negligent or even grossly sinful in time past; yet not only reason and the promises of Scripture, but experience proves the possibility of our recovery. Did not David recover from adultery and murder, Manasseh from idolatry, Zaccheus the publican from covetousness and injustice, Peter from denying Christ, Paul

* Ecclus vi. 18, 19, 32, 37.

from blaspheming and persecuting? Have not multitudes in all ages, many in our own, some perhaps known to us, recovered from the vilest acts, from the longest habits of sin? Why then cannot we do what they have done?

It must be confessed indeed, that some have naturally dispositions much more favourable both to innocence and repentance, than others. But God hath made none of his creatures incapable of what he made them for. And since he condescends to help us, we may be sure he will help us as much as we really want. The weakness of man, the force of temptation, the difficulty of duty, are of small account, where the Almighty is ready to interpose. Our own strength indeed cannot increase, in proportion as our trials do: but that, which proceeds from him, can. And this is the great felicity of our dependance upon him, that while our sense of continually needing his aid is fitted, beyond all things, to keep us humble: our assurance of having it, if we will ask and use it, gives us a comfort and a spirit that nothing else can equal.

God will certainly enable us to do every thing, which is necessary to be done. And though he may possibly suffer us to strive against some of our smaller faults, much longer and more ineffectually, than we could wish; yet we may be assured, he hath wise and good reasons for exercising us with such difficulties: and provided we continue *the good fight* with patience and courage, whatever labour and pain it may cause us now, it shall not hinder, but increase our reward hereafter: and the prospect of that is abundantly sufficient to make us happy in the mean while. Not that we can ever fit ourselves to appear before God, and be justified in his sight, on the footing of a covenant of works. Far be from us the haughty ima-

gination. We desire to be accepted, not for what we have done, but for what our blessed Redeemer hath done on our account: *and to be found in him, not having our own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.** After this we are to *hunger and thirst* both as the means of personal righteousness, and the ground of God's accepting it. In this alone we are to hope first, and rejoice afterwards.

Yet still, *if in this life only we had hope in Christ, we might* sometimes be *of all men most miserable.*† Not but that, even then, a steady course of virtue and religion would in general be evidently for the interest of mankind, and almost of every individual. But after all, there would be cases too often happening, in which the trouble of combatting evil inclinations and habits would be so great, the progress in goodness so imperfect, and the enjoyment of it so precarious and short-lived; that human resolution must be supposed likely to stagger and faint, under such trials. But since we are assured of enjoying to eternity in perfection, whatever graces we have cultivated here with sincerity; the toilsomeness of the work, and the slowness of the success, ought not to deter us in the least. Let the watchfulness over our conduct, the restraint of our passions, and wrong desires, be ever so uneasy; let this uneasiness last ever so long; let our advancement, after doing our best, be mixed with ever such mortifying failures and frailties: yet, if we be faithful unto the end, every one of these seemingly discouraging circumstances will have full allowance made for it, and be most equitably considered to our advantage. We have only to take care of our duty; and the good-

* Phil. iii. 9. † 1 Cor. xv. 19.

ness of our Maker will be sure to take care of our happiness. Nor is it indeed, could we but think aright, of very great consequence, whether we begin to taste that happiness, in any considerable degree, during our momentary life on earth: which however truly good persons, almost if not absolutely without exceptions, do; or whether it be reserved for that approaching time, when all they, that have *hungered and thirsted after righteousness* here, *shall be abundantly filled with the plenteousness of God's house, and made to drink of the river of his pleasures.** *For with him is fulness of joy, and at his right hand there are pleasures for evermore.*† *Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord: forasmuch as ye know, that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.*‡

* Ps. xxxvi. 8, 9. † Ps. xvi. 11. ‡ 1 Cor. xv. 58.

SERMON XXIII.

JAMES i. 27.

PURE RELIGION AND UNDEFILED BEFORE GOD AND THE FATHER IS THIS: TO VISIT THE FATHERLESS AND WIDOWS IN THEIR AFFLICTION, AND TO KEEP HIMSELF UNSPOTTED FROM THE WORLD.

TO understand the meaning of these words fully, it must be observed, that St. James wrote his Epistle to the Jewish believers in Christ; many of whom were not yet sufficiently apprised, how grievously the traditions of their elders had corrupted religion. For long-received errors are seldom entirely cast off, till some time after the truths, which, by evident consequence, prove them to be errors, are embraced. These new converts therefore, being accustomed from their infancy to think very highly of that purity of faith and worship, which was their principal distinction from the Heathen world, continued even after they were Christians, to give it an undue preference to the weightiest duties of common life. Their opinion of ceremonial worship indeed the Gospel had probably lowered: but it must have increased their esteem of faith. And though it was easy to understand that no faith could be valuable, unless it brought forth the good fruit of universal obedience; yet wrong inclinations led many to mistake the matter: who accordingly contenting themselves with a speculative belief, and formal devotion, thought and spoke ill of those,

who either differed from them in religious tenets, or laid any great stress on moral practice. Now had the Apostles indulged imaginations and behaviour so agreeable to corrupt nature, undoubtedly they would have gained by it a much larger number of disciples. But *they had not so learned Christ.** Each, as opportunity presented itself, diligently opposed this dreadful perversion of *the doctrine according to godliness;*† but none with a warmer zeal, than St. James: who, presiding over the Christians of Jerusalem, must have had the most experience of it. He therefore, throughout this whole Epistle, pleads earnestly for observing the moral duties, beneficence and self-government: the latter to be exercised in our words, as well as actions.

But especially in the text, he hath exalted them so high, that he may seem, and I fear hath been apprehended by some, to exclude every thing else as unnecessary. For what occasion is there, it may be said, to concern ourselves about acts of piety, when we are plainly told by an Apostle, that a good-natured, inoffensive, regular life is the whole of our duty? Now had the Apostle told us this, he would have contradicted both reason and himself. If right sentiments and behaviour be requisite in some cases; they must in all. If the good qualities of our fellow-creatures deserve proportionable esteem; the infinite perfections of our Creator demand the highest possible veneration. If we owe them gratitude for the kindnesses, which they do us; we owe beyond comparison more to him, from whose bounty every object and every capacity of enjoyment is derived. If our earthly superiors are intitled to respect and submission; the King and Lord of all hath an unspeakably stronger claim, that we

* Eph. iv. 20. † 1 Tim. vi. 3.

should pay him the profoundest homage, believe his instructions, and do his will without reserve, however notified; be absolutely resigned to his disposal, trust in his care, and live as being always in his presence. If lastly, when we have misbehaved to a man like ourselves, we are humbly to acknowledge it, and condescend to every reasonable condition of pardon; surely, when we have sinned against our heavenly Father, we are bound to the deepest self-condemnation, the most penitent confession, the readiest compliance with whatever method, he, who alone can judge of the proper one, shall prescribe for our reconciliation.

Plainly therefore a religious and Christian behaviour is equally necessary with a moral one: and there can neither be religion without feeling and expressing reverence to God; nor Christianity without believing the doctrines and observing the institutions of Christ. Nor did St. James imagine there could. On the contrary, we find him enjoining faith and prayer, giving directions about public worship, and ascribing great efficacy to the private ministrations of the Elders of the Church. Nay, in the very text, far from excluding a spirit of piety, he supposes the good deeds, which he specifies, to be done with a view of appearing *pure and undefiled before God and the Father.* The persons, to whom he wrote, had no doubt, whether Christ had commanded them to be religious: but they understood not fully, wherein religion consisted. Therefore knowing that they wanted comparatively but little incitement to the speculative and devotional parts; he insists on the other duties, in which they were deficient: kindness to their brethren, and virtuous restraint of themselves. Thus he completes the scheme of Christianity, in perfect harmony with

that which St. Paul hath elsewhere given, by adding to the obligations of a *godly* life, those of a *righteous* and *sober* one.*

To set his doctrine before you in a still clearer light, I shall proceed to shew

I. What *visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction* implies.

II. What *keeping ourselves unspotted from the world* comprehends.

III. That these two things are principal parts of *pure and undefiled religion.*

I. What *visiting the fatherless and widows in their affliction* implies.

Now, in Scripture language, to *visit* any one is to take such notice of him, and treat him in such manner, as his condition requires. For as inattention and neglect are expressed by shutting the eyes, or turning them from any one; so attention and regard, whether in order to punish, or to shew favour, are denoted by opening the eyes, and turning them towards him: which, in our translation, is often called *visiting;* a word originally of the same import with frequently looking upon, and contemplating. For seeing and knowing any case, in man ought to be, and in God is always, connected with acting suitably to it. *The day of* his *visitation* therefore, when wicked persons or nations are the subject, is the day of his vengeance:† but that *the Lord hath visited and redeemed his people,* is the highest expression of his love.‡ And in one passage of holy writ, these different senses of the word are found together in a beautiful opposition. *Thus saith the Lord God of Israel against the pastors, that feed my people: Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them; behold, I will*

* Tit. ii. 12. † Is. x. 3. ‡ Luke i. 68.

*visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the Lord.** Since therefore the proper notice, to be taken of persons in distress, is to give them all the comfort and relief, that we can; this is what *visiting* signifies in the text: as it doth also in our Saviour's future speech to those on his right hand: *I was sick, and ye visited me.*†

To *visit* thus *the fatherless and widows* is, in common acceptation, a work, not of justice but of compassion; so that St. James differs in phrase from St. Paul; according to whom the second great duty of religion is righteousness. But as righteousness there undoubtedly includes mercy; which indeed is but equity to our fellow-creatures, and strict justice to God, who hath intrusted us with the care of them: so mercy here must include righteousness; without which it cannot be real and consistent. There are indeed persons, who shew, and perhaps affect to shew, great humanity in some things, without honesty of heart in others. One sort pique themselves on their tenderness and bounty, constant or occasional, to those whom they happen to like: another, on their charity, to the poor, or sympathy with the distressed, in general: a third, on their affability and obliging deportment to all the world. But still, on some occasions, they will be oppressive or fraudulent, corrupt or prejudiced, cruel or negligent. Now with men, at least with the injudicious and inconsiderate, who make up a numerous body, such partial virtue may often take. But God expects universal rightness of disposition and behaviour: and our own consciences, in every serious hour, will reproach us, if we fail in any branch. A conduct in some points beneficent, in others injurious, must of necessity be less useful to mankind than it ought: and for the most part,

* Jer. xxiii. 2. † Matth. xxv. 36.

if not always, will be hurtful on the whole, both by its immediate effects, and the bad influence of its example.

First therefore the foundation of justice must be laid; and then the beautiful superstructure of mercy will stand firm; which every one to his power should be industrious in raising. For the state of the world very loudly demands, that we not only abstain from doing harm to each other, but do every kind of good, that we possibly can. St. James indeed hath mentioned but one, *visiting the widows and fatherless in their affliction.* But our Saviour adds more acts of compassion, concerning which inquiry will be made at the last day: and though he seems to speak as if these alone would determine our final state; yet he speaks in the same manner, of other virtues, in his sermon on the mount. And not only this, but the whole tenour of Scripture proves, that every virtue must be practised; though frequently future happiness is promised to a single one: under which, in that case, all the rest, especially of the same sort, are meant to be comprehended. For as they flow from the same principle, and are naturally connected, they are not supposed to be unnaturally disjoined. Thus in some places the love, in others the fear, or even the belief alone, of God, is put for the whole of religion; just as kindness to afflicted orphans and widows is put here for the whole of benevolence.

Nor indeed was it easy, if possible, to have pitched on a more proper specimen. Virtuous actions are laudable only so far as they proceed from virtuous motives. Now some parts of kind behaviour may be intended merely to procure a return of the same: as complaisance and courtesy. Others may be artful contrivances to promote our own more important worldly interests: as the multitude of services great

and small, which men are so officious in doing their superiors. And the vanity of raising a high character may produce not a few: indeed all that lie open to public observation. But comforting and assisting the afflicted and helpless poor, is a melancholy, troublesome, expensive work: and if performed with the privacy, needful to acquit it from the censure of ostentation, attracts but little of the world's regard, which is commonly fixed on objects widely different. This instance therefore was chosen by our Apostle with the utmost prudence, to remind men, that the only genuine beneficence is that, which extends, as opportunity offers, to the least inviting cases.

Our Saviour himself gave a rule of the same tendency, when, at a large feast, *he said to him, that bade him; when thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompence be made thee. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind; and thou shalt be blessed. For they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.** His meaning was not, to forbid any of the proprieties or civilities of life; much less to enjoin a perverse affectation of contradicting them. Neither his doctrine nor his temper, were of this turn. On the contrary, he wrought a miracle once, to enable the master of a family to entertain his guests more plentifully.† But the custom of the Jewish language, in comparing two things, is seemingly to prohibit that, which is only designed to be represented as the less valuable. Thus in the Old Testament God saith, *I will have mercy, and not sacrifice*;‡ that is, I esteem it more than sacrifice. Here then, in the

* Luke xiv. 12, 14. † John ii. 1, &c. ‡ Hos. vi. 6. Matt. ix. 13.

same manner, our blessed Lord means to prefer charity to the poor, before hospitality and generosity to such as need it not; and under this one example to intimate a general caution, that we should not content ourselves with the performance of the more pleasing offices of society; (because our inducements to these may be doubtful) but prove to others and our own minds, that our goodness is real and universal, by a more than ordinary care to fulfil those obligations, which we should naturally be most inclined to omit. And as these are not the same in all men; but some are aptest to fail in one expression of humanity, and some in another; we ought none of us to consider any single branch, however excellent, as if it were the whole; but each to think over the several particulars, be they of more or less moment, in which he can add to the satisfaction, or diminish the uneasiness of his fellow creatures: that so, by exerting a benevolence, not lavished promiscuously, but proportioned with judgment, to every person within the sphere of his influence, he may, in this part of his duty, *be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.**

Usually indeed the rich and great can do good by far the most effectually and extensively. But others also, by dutifulness or affection shewn in the nearer relations of life, by virtuous example, advice prudently given, seasonable assistance, deserved recommendation, faithful service, compassionate sympathy, obliging notice, innocent cheerfulness, and even common good humour, may be instruments of much more comfort and satisfaction to all around them, than is generally imagined.

But I now proceed to shew you,

* James i. 4.

II. What *keeping ourselves unspotted from the world* comprehends.

And in general it means, preserving our lives and our hearts free from those vices to which either the natural impressions of sensible objects, or the additional force given them by prevailing custom, may expose us. Now these are of different sorts. We may learn from the world selfishness, envy, resentment. But these interfere so continually both with justice and humanity, that in effect you have been cautioned against them under the former head. We may also learn pride: a sin, which taints the mind of man beyond most things: not only renders him disagreeable and injurious, and prevents his making reparation, though sensible that he owes it; but keeps him from perceiving his faults and his follies, and tempts him to think that application even to God for pardon and assistance is beneath him. Yet with this dreadful spirit our nature is so deeply infected, and we strengthen one another so much in it by our behaviour, that it requires, both a strict search to find how far we are guilty of it, and uncommon care to root it out.

But the most prevailing defilement of the world is immoderate love of pleasure: a disposition of worse consequence, as multitudes profess not to see the harm of it. For they conceive such exceedingly high opinions of the merit of good nature, and their own share in this merit, that they are perfectly indifferent about every thing else, and violate the plainest rules of sobriety and chastity without scruple. Yet such men will appear, when the matter is examined, extremely deficient in the very point, on which they rest their character. For they always grieve and afflict their friends; they fre-

quently wrong, in various ways, those whose happiness they were bound, and perhaps had engaged, principally to consult; they entice others into sin, and leave them afterwards exposed to wretchedness; they introduce dissentions and dishonour into families, they disorder and weaken human society. And the wrongness of their conduct is so evident, that they are usually forced by a variety of arts to banish reflection; that they may, if possible, be ignorant of their own guilt, or at least inattentive to it. For would they but consider at all seriously, and without palliating, what unkind and cruel things they do, what good and worthy actions their course of life obliges them to omit, and how strongly their example tends to make others perhaps worse than themselves; they could not fail to see, that whatever pretences, and sometimes plausible ones, there may be to the contrary, no two things upon earth are in reality more inconsistent, than good nature and debauchery.

Indeed great numbers will acknowledge this; who yet strenuously plead, that provided they do nothing prejudicial to others, there can be no harm in diverting and delighting themselves to the utmost in whatever suits their fancy. But besides the prudential objections to this scheme, it ought surely to be observed, that in point of duty we are bound to live and act agreeably to the nature given us. If passions and appetites had been the whole of our inward frame, we might allowably have indulged them to the full, like the rest of our fellow-brutes. If being also blest with reason, we were taught nothing more by it, than to abstain from hurting each other; so long as we observed that caution, it could not condemn us. But we feel ourselves qualified for better and worthier occupations, than the most innocent indulgences of sense. We

experience a higher order of affections, endued with a rightful authority over the rest. These it is our business to cultivate here, in order to reap the fruit of them for ever hereafter. And all attachments to worldly objects, which make us overlook the worth, and neglect the improvement of our own souls, though they were not in the least injurious to others, are improper and criminal debasements of ourselves. Be they vehement pursuits or light amusements, grosser pleasures or more refined ones; that we should live to them, and fill up our time and our thoughts with them, as multitudes commonly do, is altogether unsuitable to creatures evidently formed for attentions and impressions of another sort, rational, moral, religious. And though our present situation upon earth subjects us to many low employments, and offers to us many low gratifications, neither of which we are to disdain, since they are appointed for us; yet we must habituate ourselves to a superiority over them, by fit exercises of self-denial; and both consider and use them, only as being subservient to nobler purposes; ever fixing our chief regard on the duties of life, the state of our own hearts, the relation which we bear to God, the spiritual and eternal bliss, for which he designs us. Else far from being *unspotted by this world*, we shall be so immersed in it, as not to be *meet for the inheritance of the saints in light*.*

Accordingly the Scripture, which, coming from him, who best knows what is good for us, ought surely to be obeyed, were it ever so implicitly, both restrains our sensual enjoyments within certain limits, and requires a great disengagement from the most allowable of earthly satisfactions and advantages, that we may have room in our breast, for purer joys. Our Lord

* Col. i. 12.

himself hath told us; *No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon.** And his Apostles have enjoined us, *Set your affections on things above, not on things on the earth.*† *Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father.*‡ That is; immoderate fondness for the pleasures of sense, unreasonable delight in beholding the increase of our wealth, haughty complacency in pre-eminence and power, are not dispositions proceeding from God, nor consistent with a spirit of true religion. We cannot indeed preserve ourselves from being solicited, perhaps from being moved and disquieted, by some or other of the temptations that surround us: but from yielding to them, through divine assistance, we may.

Nor is it necessary for this purpose, either to retire out of society, or live uncomfortably in it. The duties of our stations and several professions we must faithfully perform, as part of the service, which we owe to God, for he will accept the commonest labour as such, if it flows from that principle. The natural gratifications, which he hath provided for us, are neither unthankfully to be condemned, nor beyond reason suspected as unsafe. And they, who run into such extremities, make religion appear uninviting to others, and lay a heavier burthen on themselves, than they will be able to bear, at least without souring their tempers; a grievous fault: and in that case the less excusable, as it is of their own bringing on, by going

* Matth. vi. 24. † Col. iii. 2. ‡ 1 John ii. 15, 16.

out of their way: whereas going forward in it would have entitled them both to surer protection and easier pardon.

But still over-free indulgence is much more general and usually more hazardous, than over-strict abstinence. And all persons, especially all who enter far into the world, should frequently and impartially examine, whether they are indeed so innocent, as they are apt to imagine; whether they are not growing vain and thoughtless, languid in their sentiments of true honour and virtue, infrequent or spiritless in their devotions, unmindful of past sins and future improvements, forgetful of their latter end. And proportionably as they discover any of these bad symptoms, they should *take* most serious *heed to themselves, lest their hearts be overcharged with the cares,* the pursuits, the diversions, *of this life; and so that day come upon them unawares.*[e]

Let us all therefore determine, neither to fly from such trials of our virtue, as Providence hath designed to strengthen and perfect it; nor yet run or be led into such as may probably overset it: but use the good and bear the evil of this world with moderation; and prepare for the rewards of the next with diligence.

Having thus explained the two comprehensive duties of benevolence and self-government, prescribed in the text, I come now to shew

III. That they are principal parts of *pure and undefiled religion.*

Indeed without them there can be nothing, that deserves the name. Religion is not a system of speculative opinions, nor a ritual of forms and ceremonies: but it consists in that love to God, as a being perfectly

[e] Luke xxi. 34.

holy in himself and good to us; and that dutifulness to him, as the Author and Ruler of the universe; which engage men to seek his favour by imitating his nature and obeying his laws. If then we neither become such as he is, nor do such things as he commands, what pretence have we to call ourselves pious persons? "*We believe* in him." And so do *the devils.*"* "We *worship* him." But utterly *in vain,*† while we continue to be, what he must for ever continue to hate; unkind to our fellow-creatures or immoral in the conduct of ourselves. Indeed what desire can we have of the reward, which he promises, heavenly happiness; when the temper, necessary to qualify us for enjoying it, is directly contrary to that, which we indulge? But a person humane in his heart, and careful in the government of his appetites and passions cannot, ordinarily speaking, be *far from the kingdom of God.*‡ He hath no worldly motive to prejudice him against religion: but all imaginable reasons to hope and believe it is true. His knowledge of what is right and fit will help to give him just conceptions of God: his esteem for it will teach him to honour God: and the sense, which he must have, of his many failures in it, will powerfully tend to make him humble and penitent, solicitous for pardon and assistance, in what manner soever bestowed; and ambitious of that blessed state, where he shall sin no more, but his weak habits of goodness will attain their maturity and bring forth their fruit in perfection.

Thus do virtuous dispositions conduct men to religion: and in return, one main business of religion is to strengthen and improve virtuous dispositions. Doubtless the love of God is *the first and great Commandment:*§ but the love of our neighbour, and of

* James ii. 19. † Matth. xv. 9. ‡ Mark xii. 34. § Matth. xxii. 38.

inward holiness, are the principal evidences, which he requires of our loving him.* Doubtless he is to be most reverently worshipped; and every duty, which he hath enjoined, whether by reason or by Scripture alone, most conscientiously performed: all comparisons of one sort with the other, which may contribute to depreciate either, must be carefully avoided; and the inexpressible good influence of merely Christian precepts on the observance of all the rest, thankfully acknowledged. But still moral obligations are by much the most numerous and extensive: the temptations, that we have to transgress them, are much the strongest: the good, which fulfilling them doth to mankind, is much the most considerable: the proof, which it gives of our advancement in piety, is much the surest. And they are completely comprehended under the two heads, mentioned in the text, good-will to others, and due regulation of ourselves: one of which includes all the exertions of virtue; the other, all the restraints of it.

If indeed we practise ever so many of both, only from regard to interest or ease, fondness for applause, fear of worldly punishment or disesteem: securing these points will be our whole recompence. If we do it from a sense of duty; that sense is very defective, whilst duty to God is left out of the consideration. Nay, if our principal end be obedience to him, and we flatter ourselves that our obedience is meritorious or faultless; our pride will convert the pretended homage into an insult. But if we faithfully endeavour to perform every moral precept, as the law of our Creator; not trusting to our own strength, but devoutly using the appointed means for obtaining the aid of the Holy Spirit; and then with humility of

* 1 John v. 3.

heart offer up to our heavenly Father all that we do, as *our reasonable service;** but unworthy of his acceptance, otherwise than through his mercy, promised to the mediation of our blessed Lord: this will be the fullest demonstration, and the only effectual one, that we can give of *pure religion and undefiled.* Scripture teaches it: our understandings acquiesce in it: the experience of the great day will verify it: and the ministers of the Gospel are expressly required to publish the notice of it beforehand. *This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly: that they, which have believed in God, may be careful to maintain good works.*†

* Rom. xii. 1. † Tit. iii. 8.

SERMON XXIV.

2 TIM. iii. 5.

HAVING A FORM OF GODLINESS, BUT DENYING THE POWER THEREOF: FROM SUCH TURN AWAY.

THESE words conclude a most dreadful description given by St. Paul of the state of mankind *in the last days*. Having foretold the general practice of almost every sin, that could be named, he surprizingly adds, that with all these they should retain a mighty pretence of acting from principle: *having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof*. But how unaccountable soever this may seem in speculation, it is common in fact. And we shall do well to enquire, both into the original and the extent of such behaviour. For though remarks have been made upon some instances of it with sufficient severity, little attention hath been paid to others of almost equal importance: and yet we are charged to *turn away from* all who are guilty of them, as blamable and dangerous persons.

The duty of man, though proceeding all from one source, naturally divides itself into religion and morals. Our understanding and our affections dictate to us the practice of both these: and both evidently promote our happiness. But they promote it by such exercises and restraints, as the inbred disorder of our frame makes uneasy, at the same time that it makes them necessary: and that injudicious tenderness for ourselves, to which weak minds, as well as bodies are

liable, creates in us a strange aversion from entering upon a course, imagined to be still harsher than it is, though essential to our welfare. Yet avowedly to disregard the obligations they are under, would be too bold a step for most men; who must therefore find out some middle way. And one such way, a very obvious one, is dissimulation: of which accordingly great use hath been made, to preserve a shew both of piety and virtue. But while just notions of either prevail amongst men, it will usually cost hypocrites more pains to gain credit, than would be needful to become in earnest good: and after all, they but seldom fail of being seen through by others, and yet seldomer satisfy themselves. Mere pretence therefore will not answer the purpose: there must be something that hath the look, even to our own minds, of reality; some counterfeit of our duty, substituted instead of it, which we can mistake for it. Were such mistakes involuntary, they would be guiltless: but the persons deceived in this case, choose to deceive themselves; which the vicious are both prone and able to do in a wonderful degree. Thus the voluptuous man takes up with present momentary gratifications for his real proper happiness: and the artful man looks on the cunning, that only serves a short-lived turn, as genuine wisdom.

Now in just the same manner men have contrived to set up for religion, some, one thing, some another: all which, though exceeding various, go under the general name of superstition. And several of these corruptions might have their first rise merely from error in judgment or ignorance. But then ill design must have supported afterwards what otherwise good sense would easily have corrected: and the main cause, why men had false notions of God and his worship, was, that, as the Apostle observes, *they did not like to*

retain the true *in their knowledge.** It may seem an objection to this, that superstitious observances are often far more burthensome, than *our reasonable service.*† But an evil heart thinks no grievance so heavy, as the exertion of good, and the mortification of sinful dispositions: besides that ways have been invented of lightening the other burthens, and reducing them commonly to a small matter. No wonder then, that in all ages *forms of Godliness without the power* took place: and being greatly diversified, as different occasions invited, have not only stood in the room of all that affectionate reverence, which men owe to God, but have often been supposed to compensate for breaking the strongest of those ties, which bind them one to another. And thus to their comfort, they found themselves at liberty, in a great measure, to be at once in favour with Heaven, and wicked.

Yet still there was remaining in their breasts a sense of right and wrong in their behaviour towards their fellow-creatures, which the grossest perversions of religion could not quite extinguish; but it would from time to time break out, and be troublesome. They could not therefore be completely easy, till this was quieted also: which accordingly they attempted by the same method that was used in the former case; debasing, as there the natural awe of God, so here the natural approbation of virtuous conduct, into a spurious imitation of it. Good minds esteem themselves, and labour to be esteemed by others, for acting an innocent and useful, and, if need be, a self-denying part in the community of mankind. But bad ones, unwilling to purchase the applause of the world and their own so dear, dress themselves up in false jewels, formed artfully to resemble the true; are so dazzled

* Rom. i. 28. † Rom. xii. 1.

and cheated with the blaze of these, that they overlook the inward deformities covered by them, and demand more respect from all around them, as persons of distinction and merit, than the most truly valuable man upon earth doth: for he knows his imperfections, and *who hath made him to differ.**

Thus then the form without the power, though much oftener censured in religion, is perhaps as frequent, and as mischievous in morality. Some have corrupted the former with injurious notions of God, with absurd modes of honouring him, with schemes of being pious, consistent with living impiously. And others in like manner have corrupted the latter with chimerical imaginations, with pernicious rules of life, with vain contrivances to be men of worth, notwithstanding a conduct in many instances notoriously unworthy. And these depravations correspond entirely the one to the other. Only the substitutes for true religion, though widely different, are most, if not all of them, comprehended under the term superstition; by which name they have been plentifully exposed and the substitutes for true morals not having been collected into a body, with a general denomination affixed to them, the abuses introduced by their means have escaped with slighter notice. The most extensive word for them perhaps is, false honour; which therefore, as I proceed, I shall commonly use in speaking of them: yet it by no means includes the whole; for false good-nature, a different thing, is perpetually cried up, to serve just the same purpose But however impossible it may be to find an adequate expression, the fact is clear; that counterfeits of virtue, as well as piety, have been sought out, with a bad design, and too successfully.

* 1 Cor. iv. 7.

These, in some breasts, dwell together amicably; either so adapted to each other, as to join in approving the same actions; or governing by turns when they differ, and dividing life between them: in which last case, if what calls itself religion chance to be offended by any enormous piece of iniquity, some sacrifice is made to it, in acknowledgment of its superior right; and after it is thus appeased, all goes on as before, through the gay and flourishing part of mens days at least. But some persons on the contrary, impatient after a while under the least restraints from it, throw it off entirely, and profess honour alone for their rule; on the dignity of which valuing themselves beyond measure, they not only laugh at superstition with very superior airs, but depreciate all regard to God, as no better than superstition. Now as it would be very unjust for a man of good morals to despise religion; because these two systems are not only both true, but indeed the same truth: so it is quite ridiculous for the man of mere honour to despise superstition; because these two are not only both false, but in effect the same falsehood. They both proceed, as you have seen already, from the same unfairness and inconsiderateness: and if we go on to examine their features more distinctly, we shall see the nearness of their relation still more fully: it will appear that each depraves equally a natural and good principle in the heart: that in each the depravation is brought about, by first exalting too highly some one or few things, to the disparagement of others of no less merit, and then carrying the favourite point so far, as turns it quickly into folly, and soon after into wickedness; yet all under colour of acting from the noblest motives imaginable. These things I shall endeavour to prove and apply.

That each is the depravation of an originally right principle in our hearts appears undeniably. Were not the reverence of an invisible superior founded in nature, it could neither have prevailed so universally, nor stood its ground so firmly, against all the sophistry, with which unbelievers have attacked it, and under all that load of absurdities, which bigots have heaped upon it. Again: were there not something essentially honourable and worthy, visionary ideas of worth and honour could not have obtained and supported themselves amongst men. So that indeed the very abuses, which are objected to religion and virtue, will, if duly considered, amount to proofs of them. No error can take deep root and spread far, without assuming a likeness to some truth, from which it seems to spring. And the primitive likeness must be a pretty strong one: but after a while, the likeness of that likeness may take its place, and by degrees all be changed into a contrary appearance: just as by fetching a large compass persons may seem to walk straight forward, till their faces are turned the opposite way.

The first step of this progress is usually fixing the thoughts and affections very intensely upon some one part of duty. And this, men argue, is being concerned for what they ought. But if this engage us too much, other objects, intitled to our attention, must go without their due share, even were we desirous they should have it. But if we had rather forget them, and make amends for it by paying a double regard to what we like better, there are no degrees of neglect to which we may not thus run. Every one observes, that in religion men set their whole hearts on some darling speculation or practice, and utterly overlook whatever else they please. Now just the same thing

happens in morals; and several of the instances coincide. As there are some, who place their religious character in performing certain rites, and keeping certain rules of outward sanctity, without the least concern about any such temper and conduct, as those rites and rules were designed to express and promote: so do others put their moral character, if it may be called such, on little external proprieties and decencies of behaviour, which they would on no account violate, yet have no scruple of trampling upon the most important social obligations; will be guilty of the greatest injustice, but not for the world commit an incivility; and while in some cases they most rigidly observe the nicest punctilios, will in others disguise the vilest perfidiousness with the meanest hypocrisy. Again: the whole piety of many lies in a vehement zeal to have such things publicly professed, as either they do not believe, or at least will not practise: and the whole virtue of others consists in extravagant talk, meant to propagate high notions of rectitude and intellectual beauty, and harmonious affections, which have scarce the least influence on their behaviour. Again: some have narrowed their Charity almost into the single act of almsgiving, or, on the strength of which they will venture to be uncharitable in many ways to whomsoever they will, but possibly dishonest, intemperate, dissolute besides. And others have shrunk their boasted benevolence into a partial good nature, arbitrarily exerted or withheld, and shewn chiefly perhaps on occasions very ill chosen; from which they claim allowance to be as inhumanly barbarous in other cases as they please, and as profane and debauched as they can. In short, men turn their pretences to morals into almost nothing, just as they do their pretences to religion: and in both they

proceed, sometimes by fashion and custom, sometimes by mere inclination or humour. To some things they adhere firmly without any reason, others they slight contemptuously, though grounded on the strongest reasons. And thus, on both sides, attachment to truth and duty is gradually effaced: till, as the one sort can be very pious with as little true religion, as they think proper; so the other can be persons of honour, with a very small share of any single good quality. Indeed it is pitiable to see what wretched poor remnants of principle such men have at last to pride themselves upon, and dignify with pompous names.

Nor do both sorts agree only in this first step, of exalting some favourite article to the undue depression of others, but in the second, of carrying it to such lengths, as turn it into folly, and afterwards into wickedness.

For as superstition presses the obligation of many things further than religion requires; so doth false honour, beyond the precepts of morality: and strange refinements are adopted, by the one in the service of God, and by the other in the intercourses of common life, which neither divine nor human wisdom can possibly approve. But further: as superstition sometimes obliges men to transgress the rules of virtue; so doth false honour very frequently oblige them to transgress the rules of religion. And indeed the superstitious man, to do him justice, though he is very apt to look down upon morality as a low attainment, yet in general doth think it one of some value: but the mere man of honour takes religion to be downright meanness; and at the same time that he will pay the most servile court to an earthly superior, thinks all expressions of duty to the Lord and King of

Heaven and Earth much beneath him: or though inwardly he thinks otherwise, yet the cowardly fear of making an ill figure amongst his brethren drives him to the absurd bravery of daring to affront God, though it be with a guilty conscience, and an aching heart. Further: as the superstitious man holds those in contempt who observe only the common rules of piety; so doth the man of false honour those who confine themselves to the common rules of virtue. And as the extravagances of the one make religion despised, and tempt men to run into profaneness; so do the wildnesses of the other make virtue laughed at, and tempt men to run into profligacy. If superstition contradicts, and then to screen itself, under-values reason: still the fiercest bigot, or most frantic enthusiast, cannot have less regard to reason, or more absolutely refuse to be tried by it, than the man of false honour. Nor can the former pay a more irrational worship to his Deity, than the other pays, and requires that every body else should pay, to himself. Further yet: men of religion and virtue are humble and diffident, candid and mild: but devotees to the shadow of each, are always haughty and positive, suspicious and ready to take offence. And when they do take offence, the hottest zealot cannot easily be more mischievous in God's cause, than the man of honour thinks himself bound to be in his own. If the religion, that torments and sheds blood to propagate faith, be cruel and detestable; the honour, that ravages and depopulates nations to extend glory, deserves no softer epithets. If superstition, on small pretences, enlists men into parties, bitter against one another, and hurtful to society; false honour, on grounds as inconsiderable, raises factions equally pernicious; and exacts the

same perseverance in adhering to, and going every length with, the side once chosen, whatever risque the whole may run by it. If superstition in some cases teaches men to stick at no wickedness, under penalty of losing God's favour; so doth false honour in others, under that of forfeiting the esteem of what is called the world. And if the former gives men hopes of escaping the anger of Heaven for many known sins by zeal for some imagined duty; the latter helps them to evade the condemnation of their own hearts for many base actions, by encouraging them to pique themselves on some one point of merit which perhaps after all hath little or no merit, in it. And thus, as, under the influence of superstition, all sense of true religion fades away; so doth all sense of true virtue under that of mere honour: till at last the meaning of this big word is become so little that a man shall claim, and be allowed, a title to it, with ever so few good qualities, and ever so many bad ones; provided he dares but venture his life to be revenged of those who shall ascribe to him any of the latter sort, which he doth not care to acknowledge.

The vilest superstition cannot possibly have depraved the heart more, than such honour: nor usually are its ill impressions so hard to change for better. And therefore though a state of corrupt religion be doubtless a deplorable one; yet that is still worse, and more immediately bordering upon ruin, when all reverence for God being avowedly renounced, and all concern for virtue in reality extinguished, the single direction left for human behaviour, the only principle professed to keep men from being abandoned throughout, is an airy notion, which will easily assume any shape to serve any purpose, that they please; or

vanish at command, when it can serve none. It should be added, that as superstition is a much wickeder thing, for corrupting religion under pretence of highly respecting it; so is false honour, for corrupting morals under the colour of refining and exalting them. And the latter corruptions are the less excusable of the two, as they can hardly in so great a degree proceed from mistake: since the duties, that we owe one to another must be considerably more obvious to our apprehensions, than such as flow from the relations in which we stand to our heavenly Father, his Son and holy Spirit.

Upon the whole, I hope it is evident, that these two characters are in many particulars directly alike: that where they are opposite, they have this likeness still, that one is as far removed from truth as the other: but that in the point before us they perpetually agree: that is, in being specious *forms* and appearances of the two most valuable things in the world, without having *the power* and substance of either; in obscuring by this fallacious resemblance that knowledge of their duty, which by reason and revelation God hath given to men, and making *the light that is in them darkness*.*

Yet, notwithstanding all that hath been said, I must beg you to observe, that both superstition may be so spoken against as to depreciate piety; and honour so as to depreciate virtue. What many delight to repeat, as a maxim without exception, that superstition is worse than having no religion at all, may be true in some cases: just as it may in others, that false honour is worse than having no rule of conduct. But since either of these may prevail in a very small and

* Matth. vi. 23.

nearly harmless degree, or in a great and pernicious one; to conclude the highest and the lowest under the same condemnation, and make him who doth no worse than load the foundation of truth with a few ungraceful superstructures, equally guilty with such as would overturn it, is either the grossest unfairness, or the most pitiable want of judgment. Religion and virtue naturally produce the happiest effects. Erroneous notions in either tend, always to weaken those effects, often to produce the contrary: and therefore it should be, the constant business of wise and good men to weed them out of human minds; but with the utmost caution; *lest while the tares are gathered, the wheat also be rooted up with them.** And they, who manifest no feeling of this danger, have either a worse intention than they own, or a zeal guided by very little prudence.

Therefore the use to be made of this discourse is, not that the enormities of superstitious men should bring piety into disgrace, or those of the votaries of false honour make true honour be deemed a phantom; not that either of these defective and faulty characters should keep themselves in countenance by inveighing against the defects and faults of the other; but that both labour seriously to supply and correct their own, and so become such in deed, as they are now only in imagination. For if our Maker demand any obedience from his rational creatures, it must be paid to his whole will, however made known: and if we are under any ties of social behaviour of self-government, we are bound to whatever is just and fit. All genuine religion leads to virtue: all genuine virtue to religion: *What therefore God hath joined together, let no man*

* Matth. xiii. 29.

put asunder : * but let all unite in the practice of both, as prescribed in the Gospel. For there and there only they will find, (what strongly demonstrates its heavenly origin) a blameless and perfect institution of duty, without any mixture of what is wrong, or any omission of what is right. *Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.* †

* Matth. xix. 6. Mark x. 9. † 2 Cor. ix. 15.

SERMON XXV.

GAL. iv. 4.

WHEN THE FULNESS OF THE TIME WAS COME, GOD SENT FORTH HIS SON.

THE redemption of mankind from sin and misery by the incarnation and death of Christ was, on God's part, entirely a matter of mere grace and favour. It depended wholly on his free choice, whether he would send a Saviour into the world at all: much more at what time he would do it. We have therefore no claim, but what is founded on his voluntary promises. These indeed, when they were given, he was bound to make good. And as some of them not only assured the world of such a person's coming, but fixed the time of it; so accordingly he came at the time fixed. It hath been foretold in scripture, that he should appear under the fourth of the great empires of the world;* whilst the second house, or temple of the Jews, was in being;† when *the sceptre was departing from Judah;*‡ at the end of so many weeks after their return from the captivity,§ each consisting not of seven days, but of seven years. And in fact, just when all these marks were visibly united, *Jesus came into Galilee, preaching and saying, The time is fulfilled; and the kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye, and believe the gospel.*‖

* Dan. ii. 44. † Hag. ii. 9. ‡ Gen. xlix. 10.
§ Dan. ix. 25, 26. ‖ Mark i. 14, 15.

The fulness of time therefore, mentioned by the Apostle in the text, which he calls *the appointed time of the Father* two verses before, is plainly that which the scripture-prophecies point out and determine. And this being kept to, as it was with great exactness; reasonable and considerate men, if the world were made up of such only, would have little farther left to do in the matter, than to acknowledge, with due admiration, that *known unto God are all his works from the beginning.** Still, modest inquiries may undoubtedly be made, why a blessing of so great importance was delayed so long. If reasons can be found, pious minds will rejoice in them: if not, they will easily be satisfied, that God can see better and farther, than his creatures.

† But the captious and the arrogant, they who must either understand every thing, or will believe nothing, have, it seems, insuperable difficulties on this head: and the one point of our Saviour's coming no sooner, is enough with them to destroy his whole claim without looking farther into it. For they say, if either his instructions or his death, were of such consequence, as Christians imagine; why was not the world blessed with them immediately? Where was the goodness, where was the wisdom, of deferring till 1700 years ago, what, if it was necessary at all, was equally necessary long before. If their own reason

* Acts xv. 18.

† *Cels.* in *Orig.* l. 6. §. 78. objects: Why so late? Why into such a corner? He should have animated many bodies and been sent into different parts of the world. *Origen* answers, that he entered before his incarnation into all that lived well: that he must appear in a nation owning one God, and having prophecies of his coming, and at a time when his doctrine could spread:* that one Christ, as one Sun, was enough for the world; and if not, all Christians are members of his body.

* On which point also he insists, l. 2. §. 30. shewing the advantage of his appearing when the world was in peace, under one great empire.

was a sufficient guide to men, there was no need of his ever coming to teach them: if it was not, he ought to have supplied the defects of it many ages sooner.

Now to these objections it would be answer enough, that God having borne testimony to Christianity, first by prophecies evidently fulfilled, then by miracles unquestionably performed; it is a much more conclusive argument, that for these reasons, it certainly came from him, and therefore came at a proper time; than that, according to our notions, it did not come at a proper time, and therefore did not come from him. Of plain facts well attested, and plain conclusions drawn from them, we are competent judges. But for creatures who have only a very imperfect acquaintance with a very small part of the world, for a very few years, to think of prescribing, by what steps the allwise God must conduct the affairs of it; and at what period he is bound to do this thing and that, if he doth it at all; is such amazing presumption, as no degree of ignorant boldness in deciding about the highest points of earthly knowledge, makes any approach to: and were it carried on to its full length, it must end in downright atheism.

For suppose a new set of objectors should arise, and argue against the creation, as these do against the redemption of man: should ask, if a good and wise being made the world for our happiness, why he made it no sooner; why he did not make us at once as happy, as we could be; why at least the conveniencies of life, the remedies for diseases, the several parts of useful and entertaining knowledge were not discovered to us immediately; why the extraordinary persons, who in various ways have enlightened and benefited the world, were sent into it so late, and not at the very first; where was the goodness, where was

the wisdom, of deferring so many things till these later ages; which, if they were wanted at all, were equally wanted long before? Could any other answer be given in defence of natural religion, than hath been given just now in defence of the Gospel; that God knows best the proper time of every thing. Let these objectors therefore chuse, whether they will stand by their objection, and be atheists; or give it up, and be Christians.

But to supply them with some inducements to chuse right, and give you some further satisfaction in so material a point, it will be useful to consider our blessed Lord's coming.

I. With regard to those who lived before it; and

II. With relation to those who lived after it.

For thence it will appear, that his coming, when he did, was no hardship to the former; and an unspeakable advantage to the latter: and therefore was well and wisely appointed.

I. That his coming, when he did, was no hardship to those, who lived before it. For though his personal appearance was late, yet that doth not hinder, but the earliest ages may have been greatly the happier for it: We learn indeed from scripture, that *there is no salvation in any other.** But we learn also, that the salvation, procured by him, extends from the beginning of time to the end of it: that *as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive:*† that good persons in the first ages, as well as in the following, were redeemed by his blood, who being foreordained from eternity, to be *manifested in due time,*‡ is therefore, in respect of the efficacy of his death, *the Lamb slain from the foundation of the*

* Acts iv. 12. † 1 Cor. xv. 22. ‡ Tit. i. 2, 3.

*world.** The reality of this efficacy we hope we are well able to defend, whenever that shall be the point in question. But in the mean time this is very evident, that whatever motive the view of his sufferings, when past, could offer to God for being gracious to men, the foresight of the same sufferings, covenanted for in time to come, must be an equal motive: for a good security is, to all intents, equivalent to an actual payment. And therefore the death of our Saviour, when he did die, was just as beneficial, as it possibly could have been, ever so much earlier. And as we firmly believe that it was highly beneficial to many, who trusted in God's mercy, with a very obscure knowledge of him: so we are far from denying, that it may have been beneficial to many others, who trusted in the same mercy, without any present knowledge of him at all.

We do indeed maintain, that human reason, unassisted by divine revelation, is an insufficient guide in matters of religion. But insufficient for what purpose? Not insufficient to shew the means of escaping future misery. If it were, since multitudes have never had any other guide, they must be miserable unavoidably, and God unjust in making them so. But we say it is insufficient, in its very nature, to give men that degree of knowledge and goodness, and consequently that future happiness, which the faith of Christ can give: and that it hath proved insufficient in fact, to give any one nation in the world any considerable degree of knowledge and goodness at all: nay, to preserve any one nation from being overwhelmed with gross ignorance and wickedness. That the heathen part of the world hath been thus ignorant and wicked, unbelievers themselves must acknow-

* Rev. xiii. 8.

ledge. And if it be an argument against the Christian scheme, that nothing was done sooner to relieve them: how much stronger an argument is it against *their* scheme, that, according to that, nothing is yet, or ever will be, done to relieve them? We teach, that God sent his Son to reform the world, when he saw it a proper time: they teach, that he hath sent no one at any time. and which bears hardest upon his goodness and wisdom? Undoubtedly they will say, that God makes due allowances for the disadvantages men are under. Why we say the very same thing: and why is not the plea as good in our mouths, as in theirs? Much better indeed: because we think unassisted reason could hardly, if at all, teach men several truths, which they think it could not fail to teach them: and therefore, as unaffected ignorance is always an excuse for faults, unbelievers, if they will be consistent with themselves, must pass a harder sentence on the Heathen world, than Christians have ground to do.

But not only the generality of the world, before Christ, were possessed of this advantage on our scheme; but a considerable part of it enjoyed, what might have been, if they would, a much greater; and as they wanted supernatural instruction, so they had it. Revelations were made, as soon as ever they became needful, first to Adam, then to Noah, then to Abraham: each of whom doubtless communicated them to their descendants. Now the descendants of the two former were all mankind; and of the last, several great nations. Then afterwards, that astonishing delivery of the law on Mount Sinai to the Jews, preceded by such miracles in Egypt, followed by so many more in Canaan, and made the foundation of a large commonwealth, professing faith in one only God, the Maker of heaven and earth, was a standing

declaration of true religion, first to all the countries in their neighbourhood, then to all the countries in which they were captives or dispersed, till the very time of our Saviour's appearance. The effects of these things, though much less than they might have been, were however considerable; perhaps the chief foundation of all the true religion which the Gentiles had. And how much less worthy of the divine goodness is the doctrine of unbelievers, that man was totally abandoned by his Maker to ignorance and sin; than ours, that interpositions from above in his favour were thus often vouchsafed? And how greatly do these lessen the difficulty, concerning our Saviour's coming so late; especially if we add farther, what the Word of God much more than intimates, that all the supernatural instructions which the world had from the earliest times, were given for his sake, and through his means. Nay, were we to say farther yet, that he gave personally the chief of them; and appeared many times for this purpose, before he appeared in the flesh: it would be nothing more, than Scripture makes probable, and learned and judicious Christians in all ages have believed.

Since therefore the world had no right at all to any Revelation of God's Will, and yet partook of it thus from the first; they were by no means hardly treated in not having the fullest manifestation of it sooner. Nay, indeed, there must be something peculiarly pleasing to good men amongst the Jews, in that gradual increase of light, which was imparted to them, brightening on continually towards perfect day. And every pious mind in every place, had one advantage, even from the obscurity which encompassed them; that they could exercise a more acceptable trust in the divine promises, while they were less explicit: and

intitle themselves to a greater blessedness, for doing so much, while they saw in comparison so little.

Still we own, that, upon the whole, they had not equal privileges with us; and yet we hold *that God is no respecter of persons:** that is, he never makes unjust or unreasonable distinctions: but that he makes very often such as we cannot see the reason for, is as evident in the daily course of nature and providence, as in the doctrine of revelation. It is most visible, that God witholds many blessings, conducive to virtue and piety, as well as to temporal happiness, from some persons, some nations, and some ages, which yet he bestows on others: and why then might he not withhold, from the ages before Christ, the advantages, which those after him receive from his coming, even though we could not shew, what end was answered by that method of proceeding? But indeed we can shew many valuable ones: as I shall now proceed to do, under the

IId Head proposed, which is: That his appearing so late, as it was no injury to the preceding times, was a great benefit to the following. For by that means, Christianity was capable, both of being proved more clearly, and spread through the world more easily, and fixed in it more lastingly.

Had our Saviour appeared in the early ages, there had been little or no room for a number of prophecies concerning him beforehand. Or if there had, it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to prove afterwards, that such prophecies were made a sufficient time before the event. And thus one kind of evidence of his authority, and a very strong one, must have been intirely lost.

And for the other evidence, that of miracles: had

* Acts x. 34.

Christ come and performed his, only a thousand or two years earlier than he did: they who object now to his coming no sooner, how much more would they have objected in that case to his coming so soon; in a period of time, when men were ignorant and unexperienced, credulous and unsuspicious, and besides incapable of conveying down to us with any certainty what passed amongst them? Indeed as it is, are not some ready to say or imagine, though very unjustly, that the credit of the Gospel history is less for its being so ancient; and wearing out continually, as time runs on? What would they have said then, if the time had been twice as long? Very possibly, there might have been but little need for them to say any thing: almost, if not quite, every ray of truth might have been lost in the thickness of the medium, through which it was to pass; and at best the Son of God might have appeared no otherwise, than as one of the fabulous heroes of Pagan antiquity. Now indeed, having a series of revelations down to his days, the latter part attesting and confirming the former, we have sufficient ground to rely firmly on the earliest. But had the whole been closed when the first was given, the proof of it must have been much weaker.

Nay, had he come in the mid-way, between those times, and that when he did; in what state would he have found the world? He would have found the Jews, far from being capable of so spiritual a religion as his, not sufficiently restrained by all the fetters, and all the pomp, of their own ceremonial one, from gross idolatry; and therefore plainly, as the Apostle observes in the condition of *children,* wanting to be kept longer *under tutors and governors, and the elements* of their law, till they should come to be of age for a state

of freedom.* Besides, they were hitherto little known in the world; and as Christianity, for many reasons, was to have its rise in that nation, the proper time for its rise was certainly, not till their testimony to the prophecies and facts on which it was built, could reach farther, and have more effect.

Then as to the Gentiles, the darkness they were in, till a small time before our Saviour's appearance, was much too great for them to bear the light of the sun, breaking out upon them at once. Or had it not, they were divided into numbers of small kingdoms and states, continually at war. The communication of a religion, from one to another of these, would have been extremely difficult: and neither miracles, nor instructions, could easily have reached far. Jealousies would have arisen, that political purposes of one against another were designed to be served by it: some such perhaps would have been grafted upon it. One nation would have favoured and established the new scheme; another rejected and calumniated it: and by these contests every part of its evidence, and especially that great one, the disinterestedness of its teachers, would have become so doubtful, that many considerate men would scarce have known what to think of it.

Besides, had our blessed Lord's instructions been given much earlier; after-times would never have known sufficiently the need they had of them: but would have imagined, that, in a little while, men would have found out of themselves, every thing which he had taught them. Even now, after the experience of so many ages to the contrary, some tell us, that the whole of religion, of all we have to believe and do, to hope or fear, is so plain, that no one could

* Gal. iv. 1, 2, 3.

ever miss it. How much more plausibly then would they have said so, and indeed how much fainter a sense should we all have had of our obligations to Christ; if the most enlightened parts of the world, had not, before his coming, wandered so long in superstition and sin?

Nor is this farther consideration without its weight: that, had our Saviour come and delivered the precepts of Christianity in their full purity and strictness, before the light of nature had been sufficiently improved, by a few of the heathens, to discern and own the justness of them; what is still said by some, would then have been said by many more: that they were utterly too rigid for the nature and circumstances of man; and unfit to be required of such creatures, as we are.

But now, instead of all these inconveniences, the opposite advantages are happily obtained, only by waiting, till *the fulness of time was come.* By this prudent delay, the Jews were so far prepared for his reception, as they were reclaimed from idolatry: and therefore the Mosaick law, which had been made to keep them from it, might be safely laid aside. Some of them were grown superstitiously fond of the legal ceremonies: these it was time to enlighten. Others were longing for that better state of things, which the Prophets had foretold: these it was time to bless with the consolation they waited for. The expectation, which they both had of the Messiah, would excite a great attention to the holy Jesus: and yet the too common opinion, that he was to appear as a temporal prince, would sufficiently keep them from being partial in his favour, since he appeared in a manner so different. Their government was still in being, and their laws in use, for those, who would, to examine into: their countrymen were spread through a great

part of the earth, to make the examination easier: their sacred books had been some time before translated into Greek, the commonest language then in the world, for every one's perusal. By these means, they and their religion were well enough known, easily to afford all needful information; yet by no means well enough liked, to prejudice men in favour of any new doctrine, that should proceed from them. Nor could men be prejudiced through them, on the side of Christianity: for though they bore a considerable testimony to it, yet most part of them did it against their wills, since, though many of them believed in Christ, the generality did not.

This condition of the Jews undoubtedly made the Gentiles much better judges, of our Saviour's claim, than they could have been, had he appeared before. And as to their own condition; learning and philosophy had flourished amongst them for some ages; but was then become more universal, than ever. It had freed the minds of many from the established superstitions. It had taught a few the reasonableness of some of the strictest precepts, which our Saviour afterwards delivered. And in these respects it had very happily made way for his doctrine. But it had been far from accomplishing any general reformation, even of opinions, in the world. The heathen morality was founded on speculation, too abstracted for the bulk of mankind; was fitted rather to confound them by endless disputes, than teach them any thing solid to rest upon: indeed to say the truth, it was never proposed to them or taught them publicly, but confined to the schools of philosophers. Nay, it had not convinced even them of many most important truths; or of the duty of professing honestly the important truths, of which they *were* convinced: for they all conformed to the esta-

blished idolatries. Now these things plainly shewed, that reason alone would never make known so much of religion, as men had need to know; and therefore revelation was infinitely desirable. Yet at the same time, no age before had ever been so unlikely to embrace a false revelation, as that was. The improvement of knowledge had thoroughly enabled them to distinguish between truth and imposture: the many cheats of Paganism had put them on their guard: the prevailing sect of the times was the *Epicurean*, which believed nothing of religion. And even the prevailing wickedness of the times would be sure to keep men from admitting, too hastily, a religion, so strictly virtuous, as the Christian; and indeed, to discourage any, that were cunning enough to be deceivers, from ever hoping to impose by artifice and fraud such a set of precepts on such an age. Had it been one of as great simplicity of manners, as some of the foregoing; it might have been pretended, that the goodness of the morality of the Gospel had made its other doctrines pass without evidence. But to require of a generation, so extremely vicious, what had never been required of man before, an absolute denial of every wrong inclination of every kind, was a full proof of honesty in the teachers: and, if they prevailed, a strong presumption of the truth of what they taught. Now we know they did prevail. And as, without the least learning, they delivered a sublimer and purer religion; so, without the least worldly help, they produced, in a few years, a greater reformation, than all the wit and power of man had ever been able to do before: of both which arguments Christianity must have been deprived, had God revealed it, before philosophy and human policy, had tried their own strength.

But further yet, when our Saviour appeared, and scarce till then, the greatest part of the known world was peaceably settled under one empire, that of the Romans. On which account, men were much more at leisure for attending to a new religion: travelling and sending intelligence was much more commodious: Christianity therefore was easily propagated; and its proofs as easily examined. Besides this, its being persecuted so soon, and so long, through the whole of that vast dominion, shewed its professors to have no worldly interest in view: which they possibly might, if the same extent of country had still been divided amongst different princes; one of whom perhaps would have protected them against another. And their getting the better, by mere argument and patience, of this most formidable power, was a strong proof that truth, and the God of truth, was their support. To which it must be added, that the scene of this noble struggle being at the same time the seat of learning, we have a sufficient account of it handed down to us from the first, both by friends and enemies: whereas in the more ignorant countries, where Christianity was taught, (and the observation is greatly to its honour) it either could not get footing, or could not keep it; and where it lasted longest, little or no history of it remains.

These advantages then our religion had, from not being published till the age, in which it was. If any former might possibly be as proper in some respects, yet none will be found so proper in all. And if what hath been said hath only weight enough to remove an objection against the Gospel, no more is necessary. But I hope it will be thought a powerful circumstance in its favour, that the time of its promulgation was so evidently the right one. And I hope also,

that considerate men will take occasion from this instance to reflect, that in others too the ways of God may be very just and wise, where perhaps, on a hasty view, they may seem very exceptionable.

But I must not conclude without adding, that the care, with which our Saviour chose for our sakes the fittest season of coming; should make us very careful for our own sakes to be fit for receiving him. The whole benefit to us of what he did then, depends intirely on what we shall do at present: and all he hath gone through to help and save us, will only increase our misery, if we neglect to help ourselves, by performing, (through the means which he hath procured for us) all the duties of a godly, righteous and sober life, in the constant expectation of his coming again. Permit me therefore to conclude in the Apostle's words. *We then, as workers together with him, beseech you, that ye receive not the grace of God in vain. For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of Salvation have I succoured thee: behold, now is the accepted, time; behold, now is the day of Salvation.**

* 2 Cor. vi. 1, 2.

SERMON XXVI.

JOHN xx. 29.

JESUS SAITH UNTO HIM, THOMAS, BECAUSE THOU HAST SEEN ME, THOU HAST BELIEVED; BLESSED ARE THEY, THAT HAVE NOT SEEN, AND YET HAVE BELIEVED.

THESE words relate to the strange unwillingness of one of the Apostles to admit the testimony of our Saviour's resurrection. And there is something so remarkable and instructive in the account, which the Evangelists give not only of the behaviour of St. Thomas in the single instance before us, but of the whole behaviour of the various persons concerned in the history of our blessed Lord, and especially in the concluding part of it, that I shall desire your attention a while to that matter in general before I proceed to our Apostle's case in particular.

Throughout the Gospels, the characters of all who appear in them, though very unlike each to the other, and some of them very uncommon, are drawn so agreeably to nature, and presented so consistent; (while yet the writers plainly used no art on the occasion, and indeed were incapable of using it to any purpose) that a considerate person, without farther evidence, must conceive the descriptions to be taken from the life. Supernatural things indeed, of the most amazing kind, are intermixed. But then the cause was worthy of them in the highest degree: and

all the mere human part of the narration, if I may call it by that name, is so entirely free from any thing forced and romantic, and represents the heads and hearts of men working so exactly as they do in fact work, yet so differently from what the unskilful would be apt to expect from them, that it very strongly confirms the truth of all that is related. I shall specify only such proofs of this point, as occur in the short story of our Saviour's death and return to life.

The picture, which we have there, of the bigotry and superstition of the Jews, how astonishing is it, and yet how just! Zealous professors of a religion which prefers justice and mercy to all things; yet excited by that very zeal to the grossest violations of both: abhorring from principle the Roman power: yet making it in form their charge against the meek and lowly Jesus, that he was dangerous to that power: determined to have his life, though visibly innocent: suborning false witnesses; raising tumults for that wicked end; yet much too scrupulous to go into the Judgment-hall, lest they should be defiled, and made unfit to eat the Passover. At the same time, Pilate, the Roman governor, appears in quite another light: a perfectly natural one indeed for a man of the world; but which plain country people, and such the first believers were, would never have placed him in, from their own invention. Contemptuously indifferent about the religious accusations brought against the prisoner: very clear, that the political ones were groundless, and therefore in earnest desirous to save him: but however, making a compliment of him at all adventures to Herod, the moment that he had hopes it might reconcile, as it did, a powerful enemy;

and ready without hesitation to crucify him, rather than run the hazard of not being thought Cæsar's friend. His wife in the mean while, with the native tenderness of her sex, and the common superstition of the age, lays a stress on her very dreams to dissuade him from shedding guiltless blood.

The disciples, on this trying incident, we find represented to be of just such various and unequal characters, as men generally are indeed, but are seldom made to be in fictitious compositions. Judas, whom Christ, though he knew him well, permitted to be an Apostle, (probably to shew, that the worst of men, with the fairest opportunities, could prove no evil against him) after following him to make a profit of keeping the purse, first betrays him for a little more profit; yet, like a true villain, aims to conceal his treachery under marks of most affectionate regard: is struck however with remorse and horror, when he begins to see the consequences of his crime draw nearer: but destroys himself, instead of asking pardon, because his own heart was too bad, to be capable of believing that his Lord could forgive him. Peter, on the contrary, whose forwardness and self-opinion had led him unnecessarily into the neighbourhood of danger, unable to go through the trial, which he had chosen, sinks into very wrong behaviour for a while: but having fallen merely through weakness, is recovered by a look of the person, whom he had so meanly disowned, and gives immediate proofs of the most ingenuous repentance. John, the beloved disciple, though driven away with the rest, (and no wonder) by their common fears, yet cannot stay with them; goes back, the same hour, to his Master at the palace of the High Priest; stands by his cross the next day, receives his

dying commands, and takes his mother directly home to his own house.

The soldiers also, and the multitude, are described with the same justness and propriety. Insolent and ludicrous beyond measure at first, and for some time; but gradually softened, and composed into seriousness, the more they saw: till at length even the Heathen centurion, who presided over the execution, *glorified God, saying, Certainly this was a righteous man; truly this was the Son of God: and all the people, that came together to that sight, beholding the things which were done, smote their breasts, and returned.** But let us proceed with the disciples.

After his death, we find them all absolutely hopeless about his resurrection: a circumstance which undoubtedly adds much weight to their subsequent conviction of it; but which no impostor would ever have invented, because it appears so hard to reconcile with their being foretold both, as they were frequently. A fair solution indeed may be given. They thought, what others of the people said, *We have heard out of the law, that Christ abideth for ever; and how sayest thou, The Son of Man must be lifted up?*† Expecting therefore a victorious and immortal Messiah, they chose, when he spoke of himself, as one who was to be taken and crucified, rather to put any meaning, or none, upon the prediction of his death, and consequently of his resurrection, than to understand each in its plain meaning. But still no one would forge a fact wantonly, that must be attended with such a difficulty as this. Or, if any one had, he would scarce have divided the matter so very exactly, as to repre-

* Matt. xxvii. 54. Mark xv. 39. Luke xxiii. 47, 48.
† John xii. 34.

sent the disciples, (which the Gospels do) paying the highest honours to his dead body, though his dying extinguished all their prospects from him; and when they had left off *trusting, that this was he who should have redeemed Israel,* yet asserting without the least doubt, that he *was a prophet, mighty in word and deed, before God and all the people.** Yet in reality, such was the very state of mind, in which persons, with their notions, must naturally be, till he rose again, supposing the Scripture history of him true: which therefore receives from hence a strong confirmation.

And when he rose again, the Gospel account of that event also carries the like internal marks of genuineness. Every thing is told in the most artless manner: hardly any of the most convincing circumstances dwelt upon, but merely related; and none, that may seem unfavourable to Christianity, concealed or palliated. The narration, a very lively picture of the disorder and confusion, into which the minds of the Apostles must be thrown by an event so surprising, so interesting; and laid before the world, with just such omissions and trifling variations, as would happen of course in giving it to the other disciples on the spot; and as always do happen, when we inform those around us, with the greatest simplicity, of what we know best. Every single part is consistent with every other when considered with due attention and candor. But if any were less so, a few differences in minute articles, relative to a thing done several years before, are never allowed to invalidate a perfect agreement in the main fact. On the contrary, the testimony of the Apostles instead of becoming suspicious on this account, would indeed be rather more credible: as they

* Luke xxiv. 19, 21.

would plainly appear not to speak from previous combination; but each to deliver fairly what he recollected, concerning a matter, of which he was much too sure in general, to be scrupulously accurate in particulars. And the Holy Spirit, which guided them, might purposely forbear extending his influence to some things of small moment, that in after-times men might shew whether they would be reasonable, or whether they would cavil.

But one thing, more especially remarkable, the writers of the New Testament have done, which no impostors would ever have done: they have recorded the history of their own weaknesses, and those of all the Apostles, just as frankly and unaffectedly, as they have done every thing else; and in no point more fully, than in the capital one of the Resurrection. They acknowledge themselves, in general, to have disregarded such repeated proofs of it, as deserved the utmost regard. And, to come now closer to the proper subject of my text, one of them acquaints us, that St. Thomas particularly, having once fixed it in his mind, that the thing was not likely, and the evidence not sufficient; insisted, that nothing less than his own seeing and feeling the marks of the wounds should convince him, that it was a reality, and not an apparition; the same person, and not another.

Now this is going a very uncommon, and it may seem an incredible, length; but there have been and are persons, on some occasions full as unreasonable, though otherwise deserving of much esteem. And we learn from a passage in St. John, which there is no colour for thinking was written to account for this before us, that St. Thomas's temper was peculiarly determined and resolute. Our Saviour, on the death of Lazarus in Judea, declares his purpose of return-

ing thither from Galilee. His followers dissuade him, because he had lately been in great danger there: He persists: *Then said Thomas unto his fellow-disciples, let us also go that we may die with him.** Now the same steady firmness, when fixed on any other point, however different, would be, as we find it here, equally hard to move. And therefore his positiveness to trust no one but himself, is far from being improbable. Yet it was notwithstanding very blameworthy. For of whatsoever one man's senses can judge, another's can judge likewise: and if credible witnesses are not credited, all the affairs of human life must be at a stand.

However, this perverseness being accompanied with no bad meaning; Thomas having only carried somewhat further, than his companions, the diffidence, of which they had all been guilty; perhaps too thinking his master's promise, that they should see him, a good plea for holding out till he, as well as the rest, had seen him; and continuing all the while in the fellowship of the other Apostles, ready to receive the proof which he demanded; our blessed Lord with perfect goodness offers it him fully. *Reach hither thy finger, and behold my hands; and reach hither thy hand, and thrust it into my side: and be not faithless, but believing.*† This condescension immediately melted down his obstinacy, and awakened every right disposition within him: so that, far from insisting on the rigorous scrutiny, which he had before resolved to make, and was now invited to, he *answered, and said unto him,* we may partly imagine with what inward feelings, *my Lord, and my God.*‡ Jesus, in whom dignity and mildness were mixed in the most accurate proportion, spares his convert the

* John xi. 16. † John xx. 27. ‡ John xx. 28.

additional confusion of a reproof: but gives him an instruction, suitable to the occasion, necessary for himself, and useful to all the world ever after; that no great virtue could be shewn merely by admitting scarcely resistible evidence, and consequently no great recompence could be expected for it: but that preserving a mind, open to embrace, and careful to seek after, such lower degrees and less obvious kinds of it, as our heavenly Father may think fit to bestow, is giving a valuable proof of upright intention, and taking a considerable step towards the attainment of distinguished happiness hereafter. *Because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen and yet have believed.*

This declaration doth not mean, that any believers merit a blessing; which our faith no more deserves, than our good works do: but only, that faith, productive of good works, qualifies them to receive from God's free gift, that blessing, which Christ hath merited. Nor doth the former part of it, which comparatively slights the faith of St. Thomas, imply, that our Saviour's personal attendants, who had the testimony of sense for his resurrection and other miracles, were either precluded from any reward, or confined to a small one. For they had overcome very strong prejudices: and, had they manifested ever so little virtue in the speculative part of their faith; yet they might and did manifest a great deal in the practical part; by adhering to it under temptations, by professing it under persecutions, by promoting it with unwearied zeal: on which accounts a superior degree of glory was justly promised to the Apostles; notwithstanding *they believed because they had seen.*

But our concern is chiefly with the latter clause of the text: and let us consider well, what our Saviour

teaches in it. Not that they are blessed, who have had no evidence, and yet have believed. In one sense indeed, of great importance, even these are blessed. They have thrown themselves, with humble minds, on God's mercy: they are directed by the wisest precepts: they enjoy the noblest hopes: a future state is not less real, for their want of skill to prove it: and whatever the ground of their faith may be; still the fruit of it, piety and moral goodness, are the true qualifications for happiness, here and hereafter. But though such persons are doubtless rewardable for the consequences of their belief, they are not so for their belief itself, considered as a meer assent of the mind. And therefore our blessed Redeemer speaks here of a different case from theirs. He came, not to require of men faith without or beyond evidence, but to lay evidence before them: and to assure them, that paying reasonable attention to it, should be rewarded, and rejecting it unreasonably, punished.

Some indeed have argued, that what appears to us false, we cannot receive; what appears to us true, we cannot help receiving; and things will appear as they do: so that in belief or disbelief there can be neither praise nor blame. But, as by shutting our eyes, or turning them another way, we can exclude the sun itself from our sight, if we please: so, by refusing to attend, we may evade the force of the plainest proofs; and by attending partially, we may suffer ourselves to be overcome by the slightest objections. Much more then is it possible to judge wrong or right in matters less clear; according as we do or do not permit vicious inclination, groundless prepossession, indolence or fancy to influence our choice. And having it as truly in our power to behave well or ill in this respect, as in any other; we may be as accountable for our opinions

as our actions. It is therefore no less real, and sometimes no less important, a part of our duty, to conduct our understandings well, than our affections and appetites. And further, as in the government of these last, we are to be strict in proportion as negligence would be hurtful; and less care is requisite, where little or no harm can follow: so in the use of our reasoning faculty, though we ought to avoid all errors, if we can; yet we should be much more vigilant against errors to the disadvantage of religion and virtue, than errors in their favour; and our guilt is greater, if we are not: because the former must be pernicious, and the latter may be innocent.

But perhaps it will be said, that, whatever God intends for the rule of our faith and practice, he hath certainly made both the truth and the meaning of it so clear, that we cannot mistake about it: and therefore whatever doctrines or precepts are not so clear, need not be regarded by us. Now undoubtedly, were we to have chosen our own condition, we should have chosen it to be thus pleasing and secure. Or, were we to have guessed about it beforehand, we might have been apt to guess it would be so. But now, when we know from fact, what it is in other respects; to flatter ourselves, that in respect of religion it must needs be so perfectly agreeable to our inclinations, is palpably absurd. In every part of our conduct besides, we are liable to err fatally. How can we imagine then that there is no possible hazard in this part? The world, in which we live, was not designed for a place of safety but of trial. And as we are tried with many difficulties in doing what is right, why may not we be tried with some in discovering it? Indeed we actually experience that we are. In multitudes of cases, great attention is requisite to find out

truth: and yet great inconveniences follow, if we miss of it. We have certainly cause to hope, that the goodness of God will relieve us some way, sooner or later, from any extreme ill consequences of the mistakes, that we cannot help. But they have no title to relief, who, notwithstanding all that they see to the contrary, will be positive, that there can be no danger, and therefore needs be no care; but what they do not fully understand, and are not absolutely sure of, they may reject without hesitation. These very persons, in their temporal affairs, are strongly moved by what they apprehend but very imperfectly; believe every day upon mere probabilities, often small ones; take great notice even of possibilities; and would think and find it madness to act otherwise. Why then may not religion, considering its awful nature, deserve a reverend regard from them, though the proofs of it were less cogent, or its truths more embarrassed with difficulties, than they are? The mere suspicion, that a just and holy Being rules the world, makes our case, and ought to make our behaviour, very different from what it would be else. Every degree of evidence for it increases the difference. And the obscurest intimations, that can be given us, concerning his nature, our own condition, and what he expects from us, deserve our most serious practical notice.

Nor must it be objected, that if such things were intended to influence human life, every one would experience their influence very powerfully, which many do not. For was not reason, was not the principle of self-preservation intended to influence human life? Yet are there not multitudes, who shew, and who have, comparatively, very little of either? But you will say, then our Maker doth not deal equally with us. And in one sense it is true: he doth not confer

equal advantages on us. But what claim have we to them? If he may create various orders of beings, one much superior to another, as we all know he hath done; he may certainly give one part of the same order what superiority he pleases over another part. And that we should be ignorant, why he doth so, is no more a wonder, than that we are ignorant, why men are not angels, or why brutes are not men. Yet, in another sense, our Maker deals very equally by us all. He will make due allowance, both to the inward frame and outward condition of every individual; requiring only according to what he hath bestowed: which is perfectly consistent with bestowing on some far more than on others.

But it will be said, that whatever imperfection or whatever inequalities there may be from mens faculties or circumstances, in their knowledge, either of the particular doctrines and precepts, or the general obligation of natural religion; yet if God vouchsafes to superadd a revelation, one main end of that must be, to dispel the darkness, in which reason leaves us; and it must answer its end: and yet in the Christian revelation many things remain as dark, as they were before. But indeed the solution of the former objection, solves the present also. If God may justly give us, at first, as low a capacity, or as little opportunity, for knowledge, as he pleases: why may he not afterwards make as small an addition to it as he pleases; and yet man be bound to receive such addition with thankfulness, and regulate his conduct by it? If but the least new discovery is made to us, if but the least new light is thrown on what we discerned imperfectly before, it deserves proportionable gratitude. And how much then do we owe for the many alarming and

endearing truths, part of which are notified solely, and part very strongly confirmed, by the Gospel of Christ!

But perhaps it will be urged, that still, besides leaving several of the doubts of reason undetermined, and its difficulties unremoved, Scripture hath added several more to them, arising from its own mysterious doctrines: and instead of clearing up every thing, proposes to our belief some things impossible to be cleared up; with which otherwise we should never have been perplexed. And we own this to be fact. But then, doth not the teaching of almost any new branch of science, in the whole compass of nature, produce the same effect? Truth is infinite: our capacities finite. And the necessary consequence is, that the farther our knowledge extends whenever we attempt to look beyond it, (which we need not) the wider we shall find the unknown region, that borders upon it on all sides, and incloses it round about. So that if we will insist on comprehending every thing, before we believe any thing, the more is made known to us, the less we shall obtain of the satisfaction we demand.

Once more, however, it may be objected; that supposing God to favour men with a revelation, he would certainly not fail to provide, that all men might enjoy its full benefit, since they are all said to have needed it from the earliest ages: whereas Christianity appeared late in the world, hath never been notified through the whole of it, nor been accompanied with equal evidence where it hath been preached. But here again: if God is not bound to give all men originally the same advantages, with regard to religion or any thing else, as he plainly doth not, how is he

bound to it in what he superadds? Neither justice, nor wisdom, nor goodness, oblige him any more to the one, than the other. Yet he did manifest to fallen man immediately as much of the doctrine of redemption as he saw to be requisite: which if men lost, instead of propagating it, the fault was their own. They who were ignorant of Christ before his coming, or have been so since, may possibly have received much good from it; but assuredly cannot be in a worse condition, because others know him. And there is evidently more kindness in making him known to some, than to none. All, to whom his Gospel is preached, be it with more evidence or less, are, or may be, the better for it if they will. Such as firmly believe and obey it, have the highest assurance of pardon, grace, and everlasting happiness. Whoever thinks it but probable, hath both a direction, and a comfort which others have not. Whoever by means of it is but strengthened in the principles of natural religion, nay whoever hath them but more frequently laid before him, may gain considerable improvement from it. For even the bare proposal of truth is often efficacious both against ignorance and error.

If still it be imagined strange, that this great remedy for our souls hath been a secret to so many for so long a time, is rejected by some who say they have examined it, and hath little or no good effect on others who profess to accept it; consider only, what is the case of the best remedies for our bodily diseases? Were they discovered with ease and immediately? Are all persons now apprized of them? Is there no room left for doubt concerning them? Do none declare and inveigh against them? Do they answer, in every case, every good purpose that nature intended them for? We have but too much experience of the

contrary. And yet doth all this hinder them from being valuable gifts of Providence; or justify those, who despise or neglect them? If not, why should any one be staggered by similar objections against religion? Nay, supposing they did lessen the certainty of it, why should he not *take heed,* while he travels through the obscure and doubtful road of life, to every probability of direction from above, *as unto a light that shineth in a dark place,* however faintly it be, *until the day-dawn, and the day-star arise in his heart?**

This would be our wisdom, though the evidences, which we have for Christianity, were of the lowest kind. But what will be the folly and guilt of scorning it, if after all they should, as they do, approach to the highest? We have not indeed the immediate testimony of our senses for the resurrection of Christ, for his other miracles, and those of his Apostles: but we are as sure of them, as we could have been if we had lived within a century or two of their days. For the books of the New Testament are unquestionably of no less authority now, than they were 1500 years ago. And even they, who received personally the account of these mighty works from eye-witnesses to them, had perhaps but few of them the attestation of so many concurrent witnesses, as we have, recorded in holy writ. And they could not have in the same degree (what length of time alone can give completely, and hath given us) the knowledge, that those facts, which were at first delivered to them for true, were not afterwards discovered to be false. We are certain, that Christianity, far from being detected, established itself on earth, and triumphed over both Jewish and Pagan unbelief by evidence alone: that

* 2 Pet. i. 19.

many of its prophecies are already fulfilled, and room is left, after so many ages, for the fulfilling of the rest: which last point alone will be found, on due consideration, a remarkable circumstance, and very unlikely to be accidental. Then further: as some of the arguments for it are grown stronger than they were formerly, to make amends for such as may have grown weaker; so we have others which must always continue of the same force: those, which arise from the amiableness, the dignity, the perfection of our Saviour's character; from the excellency and efficacy of his precepts; from the internal marks of genuineness and veracity in the writings of the Evangelists and Apostles.

Yet all this proof, we confess, amounts not to the absolutely full conviction, which they had, who *saw with their eyes, who looked upon, and their hands handled the word of life.** It is neither so obvious, but we may overlook it; nor so powerful, but, if we take pains, we may resist it. Here then we undergo a test of our fairness and integrity, which, in comparison at least, the very first Christians did not. But then, you see, our gracious master hath proportioned a blessedness to it. And besides, they and their successors underwent a much severer test, which we do not; that of dreadful worldly sufferings for the profession of the Gospel. Ours is far gentler, and more eligible: only whether we will believe on evidence abundantly sufficient, though not the highest possible: whether we will *walk by faith, not by sight;*† and preserve our loyalty to *our Lord and our God,* unshaken by the false opinions and bad customs of a thoughtless world, by the cravings of sensual appetites, and the tumults of irregular passions

* 1 John i. 1. † 2 Cor. v. 7.

and fancies. This is the whole of what Heaven requires of us: and if we do it but conscientiously for the short space, that we have to remain here, *the trial of our faith shall be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ: whom having not seen, we have loved; in whom, though now we see him not, yet believing we* may justly *rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory;* assured of *receiving the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls.**

* 1 Pet. i. 7, 8, 9.

SERMON XXVII.

ROM. x. 10.

FOR WITH THE HEART MAN BELIEVETH UNTO RIGHTEOUSNESS: AND WITH THE MOUTH CONFESSION IS MADE UNTO SALVATION.

A CONSIDERABLE part of professed Christians go through the world without forming to themselves any fixed rules of action at all: but in some things follow their own inclination and fancy, how often soever it varies; in others, general custom or particular examples, with much indifference, whether they be good or bad: and so they patch up a most inconsistent life; many of them scarce ever reflecting enough to see their inconsistencies; and not a few absurdly imagining, that human conduct was not intended to be of a piece with itself.

Others, who do preserve uniformity of behaviour, have yet no inward principle from whence it flows, beyond reputation or private convenience. Even they who profess a high regard to morals, and in some instances appear to feel it, have too commonly no feeling at all of the strongest moral tie which can be, that which binds us to our Maker; perhaps have never asked themselves in earnest, whether they believe in him: or, if they think they do, have no serious impressions of gratitude to the Author of all good, of duty to the governor of the universe: will acknowledge, it

may be, when pressed by argument, that all possible reverence is owing to him; yet absolutely never worship him in private, and very seldom condescend even to seem to worship him in public. Whatever the hasty reasonings of a partial heart suggest to them, they will esteem a law of God and nature. But if any thing unwelcome either to their vanity or their sensuality be offered to their belief, they will reject it instantly, as bigotry and folly, without examination. And if their way of thinking and living be but such, upon the whole, as recommends them to the indulgence of those who need the same indulgence; as to any thing further, concerning the regulation of their tempers or behaviour, the means of pardon when they have sinned, or of help to do better, there is little occasion, they apprehend, to trouble themselves.

This view of things cannot but raise compassionate and melancholy reflexions in every pious breast. But what completes the unhappiness is, that while such numbers openly despise religion, great numbers more, who have no doubt of its truth, nor, when they consider of its importance, are yet so far from being zealous for it, that they seem ashamed of it: either omitting those public evidences of their Christianity, which they know they are commanded to give; or meanly excusing their observance of religious duties as weakness or compliance with custom: and seldom shewing in their common conversation near so much concern for that faith, from which they pretend to promise themselves eternal felicity, as they do for their slightest worldly interests, not to say their most trifling amusements.

The Spirit of God therefore, who clearly foresaw, that this, however strange, would be the turn of mankind, that some, would think it needless to believe, and others to profess their belief, hath warned men

separately against each of these errors in many places of the New Testament, and jointly against both in the text: which plainly declares, that faith in the Gospel is the ground of our acceptance with God at present; and that an open acknowledgment of the Gospel, in consequence of that faith, is one of the things necessary to our happiness hereafter. *For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness: and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

From these words therefore I shall endeavour to explain the obligation and importance,

I. Of Christian faith.

II. Of a public avowal of it.

I. The obligation and importance of Christian faith.

God, having made us reasonable creatures, may both as justly and as wisely require from us that we conduct our understandings aright, as our affections, appetites or outward actions; the conduct of all which depends on our understandings in a great degree. If then religion be attended with appearance of evidence, inquiring into it must be our duty: and if the evidence deserves belief, unbelief must be a sin; a greater or smaller indeed, according as it arises from neglects or prejudices more or less criminal; but a sin it must be, wherever the proofs are within reach. And we may not only well presume that God would make them sufficiently obvious, but on trial may perceive that he hath: adapting a great variety of them to every degree both of natural capacity and acquired knowledge, in such a manner, that no one needs be destitute, where Christianity is freely taught, of light enough to convince and direct him.

Doubtless we ought to judge of unbelievers with the utmost reasonable charity. But, at the same time,

both we and they should consider well our Saviour's declaration, that *If any man will do God's will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God.** For thence it follows, that they who fail of knowing his doctrine, where it is *taught as the truth is in Jesus,* † fail of it for want of doing his will. Either vicious pleasure, or worldly interests, or indolence, or resentment misleads them, which are visibly the common cases; or, let them be ever so clear of guilt in these particulars, they are influenced by the vanity of being superior to vulgar ways of thinking; the pride of not being convinced, but by just such evidence as they please to require; or the presumptuousness of opposing their own imaginations concerning the probabilities of things, (notwithstanding daily experience of their mistakes) to the express declarations of an all-knowing God. In vain do men plead their morals in other respects, while such immoralities as these have dominion over them; or their obedience to the commands of the Almighty, while they reject the great Commandment of faith in his word.

But the duty of faith doth not consist merely in giving our assent to the truths of religion: a principal part of it is, to recollect them frequently; and strengthen their influence by repeated and voluntary acts of the mind. There are perhaps few in proportion, who had not a sort of belief, when they thought of the matter last. But their faith hath lain asleep and forgotten, till not only their lives have been filled with such behaviour, but their minds with such notions and maxims, that it is hard to say, which prevails most in them, the Christian or the infidel. Or if they remain ever so much persuaded, that religion is true; they come to look upon it, as a truth upon which they are

* John xii. 17. † Eph. iv. 21.

not to act, and scarce to think of, till they have almost done acting. And by that time, some have neglected it so long, that they go on, with great tranquillity, neglecting it to the end; while some again awake from this dream only to fall into another, that being sorry for having omitted their duty, when it is become too late to do it, is doing it sufficiently. They, whose faith lies in this manner dead in them, have in effect none at all; none of the right sort, none to any valuable purpose. And therefore the great thing incumbent on us is, to revive and exert our persuasions of divine truths; oppose them to the temptations which assault us in this bad world; and believe, not with a languid acquiescence in certain articles and precepts, when at distant times we happened to recollect them; but with a vigorous effort of all our faculties to feel their force on every occasion. For it is not with the understanding alone, but *with the* whole *heart,* that *man believeth unto righteousness.* Nor do we become of the number of the faithful indeed, till we are determined effectually to bear faith and true allegiance to our heavenly king, as well as are convinced of his title to our obedience: till we resolve to live to him, who we believe, hath died for us; and bring forth the *fruits of the Spirit,* * who hath planted the seeds of them in our hearts. By this rule then let us *examine ourselves,* (for it much concerns us) *whether we be* really *in the faith,* † or only seem so to be, deceiving our own souls.

I now proceed to shew the importance of this duty: which is fully expressed in saying, that *man believeth unto righteousness:* that is, by means of Christian faith, he becomes acceptable to God, and gradually improves in all piety and virtue.

* Gal. v. 22. † 2 Cor. xiii. 5.

Every one of our actions derives its value from the belief or persuasion, with which it is performed. Were we to do ever so good a work, without being moved to it by a good principle, we might be more useful, but we should scarce be better, than if we had not done it at all. But when we act from conviction of an inward obligation; if it be of morals, then we act virtuously; if of religion, piously. Therefore without faith of one sort, we can do neither: and in proportion as our faith is perfect, we shall do both. A mere sense of the fitness of moral virtue is no inconsiderable antidote against many sins. But religious faith hath unspeakable advantages beyond that which is moral only. For the serious persuasion of a witness, *who seeth in secret*,* of an omnipotent Sovereign, equally benevolent, wise, just, and holy, must inconceivably animate to every thing good, and deter from every thing evil.

Yet still, considering our native ignorance, and the original depravity which we find within; considering also, that by repeated transgressions we fail not, more or less, to inflame our passions and appetites, darken our understandings, impair our strength, obscure the prospect of all that we could hope for, and open a dreadful one of what we may fear: the faith of natural religion alone would leave us in a great measure undirected, unassisted, uncomforted; as the experience of all, who have been favoured with no other guide, hath always shewn. Nay, instead of ever giving in fact, the help, which from reasoning we conclude it might, it hath always, in all nations, been overwhelmed with errors, both speculative and practical. But revelation amply bestows on us every thing we want; a plain and complete law of life, a most

* Matth. vi. 6.

engaging example of perfect conformity to it, pardon of sin on most equitable terms, aid from above to do our duty, and eternal happiness for a sincere, though imperfect performance of it. How greatly we stand in need of these things, a little serious thought will make any one feel. Or if it did not, we surely must see, that God would not have offered them to man, by a method so extraordinary, as the incarnation and death of his Son, and upon the express condition of faith in him as the author of them, if there had not been strong reasons for it. And therefore whoever slights these appointed means *of God's righteousness*, must expect to stand or fall on the foot of *his own*, * without allowance; and will have nothing to plead hereafter against bearing the punishment of all his sins, but principally the capital and leading one, of a wilful and careless unbelief. May God incline our hearts to consider what we are, and to accept his mercy! For then, *being justified by his grace, we shall be made heirs of eternal life;* † be *sanctified by the Holy Ghost,* ‡ and gradually *perfected in every good work to do his will:* § a state, not merely of outward regularity, but of inward purity, which our natural abilities themselves can never attain.

But in order to this amongst other duties, we must join with our faith, as the text instructs us,

II. An open avowal of it. For *with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

There is no part of the Gospel delivered in a more solemn and striking manner, than that, which three of the four Evangelists record, and one of them twice: *Whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father, which is in Heaven:*

* Rom. x. 3.
† Tit. iii. 7.
‡ Rom. xv. 16.
§ Heb. xiii. 21.

*but whosoever shall be ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels.** It could not be a slight cause, which moved him to speak thus: and there was evidently a very great one. He came to establish on earth a public profession of true religion, for a testimony to all nations. He intended his disciples for *the light of the world.* He formed his church to be as *a city on a hill,* † to attract the eyes, and direct the steps of bewildered travellers. Concealment therefore was utterly inconsistent with his design: and all who believed in him must acknowledge him. That persecution and death would be the consequence, he forewarned them, was to be no objection. They were neither *to forsake the assembling of themselves together,* ‡ nor dissemble their faith, when separate; but to *sanctify the Lord God in their hearts, and be ready to give an answer to every man that asked them an account of the hope, that was in them.* §

This then being their case, what shall we think is ours? can it be allowed us, can we wish it were allowed us, to avoid bearing testimony to him, who *hath redeemed us to God by his blood,* ‖ when it will cost us only a little harmless contempt, and perhaps not even that? Or whatever we may wish, let us remember, that in his just-mentioned awful declaration, it is not being afraid, but *ashamed of him,* that he condemns: it is not the terror of a persecuting *generation,* but the scorn of a *sinful and adulterous* one, by which he cautions us not to be moved. If therefore we conceal, on account of that scorn, any part

* Matth. x. 32, 33. Mark viii. 38. Luke ix. 26. xiii. 8, 9.
† Matth. v. 14. ‡ Heb. x. 25. § 1 Pet. iii. 15. ‖ Rev. v. 9.

of our religious professions, we are guilty in the very particular, against which his sentence is pointed: and more guilty still, if we slight it, without so much as this to excuse us; from mere indolence or humour; or because, resolving to be wicked, we will not acknowledge what binds us to be good.

But to see the obligation of this duty in a fuller light, let us consider in a distincter view, the nature, the reasonableness, the usefulness of it.

We are not required to make an ostentation of our Christianity; or to introduce even the mention of it to the irreligious unseasonably, but only when there is hope of doing good. None who is not well prepared in point of argument, should be desirous of entering into conversation about it with unbelievers. But especially the young and tender-minded should be very cautious of engaging in so unequal a combat, as that of ingenuous modesty against the profligate boldness of the scorner and the libertine. Or if at any time they are compelled to it, they should insist on the general proofs of Christianity, and not be drawn into debates on particular difficulties, which, probably they are not able to solve without help; but wave the present discussion of them, and apply for due information about them. Nay indeed, the fittest in all respects to *contend for the faith** should watch opportunities, not force them, lest they exasperate and harden men, instead of reclaiming them. And, be the occasion of declaring ourselves ever so proper, we should be careful not to do it with intemperate warmth; but always preserve the spirit of our religion, while we assert its honour; and express more concern for the impious and profane, than indignation at them; considering seriously the miseries, in this world and

* Jude, ver. 3.

the next, which they bring upon themselves, as well as on those whom they seduce.

After guarding against these mistakes, what is the duty which remains? Only this, that without forwardness or affectation, without vehemence or bitterness, every Christian avow himself, in every becoming way, to be what he is; by constantly attending the public worship of God, renewing his baptismal vow in the solemn ordinance of confirmation, statedly coming to the holy table; and shewing, by the reverence of his deportment, that he doth all this as matter of conscience, not of form; by practising with simplicity and openness every other precept of his religion; and leaving no room to doubt, from what principle he acts: by *abstaining from all appearance of evil** in his own behaviour and discourse, and approving it in that of others: by despising the contempt or hatred, which may fall upon him for such a conduct; *esteeming* as an honour *the reproach of Christ;* and *chusing rather to suffer affliction,* if he must, *with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.*†

These are the things, comprehended in the confession, that Scripture enjoins. And is any one of them unfit to be done by us, or unworthy to be required of us, or too heavy a burthen to be laid upon us? And if none be, what have we to object? We cannot be neuters between religion and irreligion: neither God nor man will understand us to be such. Our Lord himself hath made the declaration, and it is no less just, than peremptory, *He that is not with me, is against me.*‡ Which then are we? Enemies or friends? Do we pronounce, by declining to appear for it, that the Gospel of Christ is of no value; or, by

* 1 Thess. v. 22. † Heb. xi. 25, 26. ‡ Matth. xii. 30.

*not being ashamed of it, that it is the power of God unto salvation?**

But indeed, were it allowable to be of neither part openly, is it advisable? By declaring ourselves for the truth, we strengthen ourselves in it: we take up a character, which it will be our glory and our happiness that we are bound to maintain. And in all likelihood we shall thus get rid of solicitations from infidels and libertines: who will never quit us, while they find us wavering or fearful to be touched, upon the subject; but will surely, either from decency or despair, be silent, when we have notified in a prudent manner our fixed resolution. To this we might also, if need were, add a most equitable request; that as they set up for the great and only friends of liberty, they would tolerate us in an error, (if it can be one) which tends to make every individual virtuous, and every society flourishing; which comforts us under all afflictions here, and delights us with the hope of endless felicity hereafter: and that they would not think the belief of an ungoverned world, of unrewarded virtue, and unpunished villany; of God's having left his creatures without instruction in their duty, without certainty of his pardon and grace, without assurance of their future existence and reward, so extremely meritorious a doctrine; as to intitle the maintainers of it to persecute the rest of mankind with scorn and ridicule, (the only weapons they have) till all are brought to an unity of profession in this blessed creed.

Concealing our faith may indeed secure us from being attacked upon it; but not from the dangers of licentious discourse, not from being tempted in various ways by others, not from growing indifferent and betraying ourselves into sin. Besides: whilst we keep

* Rom. i. 16.

our principles unknown, through a mean-spirited fear of bad men, we miss the esteem and friendship of the good: which may be of unspeakable use to us; perhaps in the most important respect, enabling us to *hold fast our integrity.**

But we are to measure the value of owning our regard to religion, not only by the benefit, which we may receive from it, but the service, which we may do by it. One branch of it is, frequenting public worship. Now it is very true, that many who stay at home, can use the same prayers, and read as good sermons in private, as they hear in the congregation. But, (besides that probably they will not if they can; and that certainly numbers, whom their practice may influence, cannot if they would;) were every single good Christian to spend the whole time, which they employ in religious exercises here together, just in the same manner separately; still the mutual animating of each other, the instructive example, the awakening call to a thoughtless world, these things would be lost; the Christian church, *the pillar and ground of the truth,*† would fall to ruin, by quick degrees; the Christian system of religion and virtue would die and be forgotten with the present believers in it, or even before them; excepting so much of it, as might perhaps be imperfectly preserved by methods less effectual.

It is not therefore without cause, that so great a stress is laid on attending God's holy ordinances: which whoever frequents reverently, teaches others to frequent them in the same manner; but whoever shews contempt of them, encourages others to do so too. And the like is the case through the whole extent of piety and morals. Where our influence is the weakest, yet every one who appears in earnest on

* Job ii. 3. † 1 Tim. iii. 15.

the side of God and Christ and virtue, must add some strength to the cause, and some spirit to the supporters of it. It is a common warfare, in which we are engaged. If any one be allowed to desert his station, every one must have the same allowance: and then, humanly speaking, what hinders, but all must be given up? The patrons of infidelity and libertinism, who, as one should think, have many reasons to be reserved, they declare themselves without the least scruple. Only consider therefore, if we are to be shame-faced and silent, while they are bold and boastful; how monstrous is the impropriety, and how unhappy will be the event!

But besides the general consequences of *holding fast the profession of our faith without wavering,** or shrinking from it; let us reflect also, what particular effects it may have on our friends, our dependants, our servants, our families; on those who are united to us in the nearest relations, and whose happiness constitutes a great part of our own. All who barely know us and think well of us, will of course be in some degree, either the steadier in the faith and practice of Christianity for our public adherence to it, or more unsettled for our seeming to slight it: and this one difference in our behaviour may very possibly have weight enough with more than one amongst them, to determine his conduct, and state for ever. But such as are intimate with us, will be more powerfully swayed by what they see in us. And they who live under our roof, who naturally learn almost every thing from us, who pride themselves perhaps in being like us, there is no hope that they will be religious, if they have any ground to imagine, that we are not cordially so. But taking due care to

* Heb. x. 23.

shew them that we are, will do much towards promoting their future happiness at the same time with our own; and indeed the present welfare too of both. For as religion furnishes the strongest motives to every part of virtue and prudence; so unless our example instruct those around us to perform their duty towards God, they will probably soon come to neglect it towards us, as well as towards others and themselves: whereas giving proof that we honour him, is the way to be honoured in thought, word, and deed, by them; by all the good, and even by most of the bad. Or how unequally soever esteem may be distributed now, all will be abundantly rectified in that decisive hour, when they, *that sleep in the dust of the earth, shall awake: some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt:* when *they, that be wise, shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; and they, that turn many to righteousness, as the stars, for ever and ever.**

* Dan. xii. 2, 3.

SERMON XXVIII.

LUKE xiii. 23, 24.

THEN SAID ONE UNTO HIM, LORD, ARE THERE FEW THAT BE SAVED? AND HE SAID UNTO THEM, STRIVE TO ENTER IN AT THE STRAIT GATE: FOR MANY, I SAY UNTO YOU, WILL SEEK TO ENTER IN, AND SHALL NOT BE ABLE.

THERE is scarce any thing which proves both wisdom and rightness of mind more fully, than proper behaviour on sudden occasions, and proper answers to unforeseen questions: for what a man shews himself to be at such times, we have in general great cause to believe he really is. Now to this trial, our Saviour, living a public life, in the midst of persons taking all advantages to insnare him, was perpetually exposed; and his character never suffered by it. His temper continued always composed and beneficent: his replies, when circumstances allowed it, were open and plain; at other times mixed with prudent reserve; but always tending to convert the most unfit enquiries into opportunities of communicating seasonable instruction. One instance of this, amongst many, the text affords: where we find, that as *he went through the cities and villages teaching*, some forward inquisitive man was earnest to be told, if there should be *few* or many *saved*. To this enquirer personally he answered nothing: but reproving his superfluous

inquisitiveness by a silence, that expressed at once dignity and mildness, addressed himself to all, that were present; acquainting them what was the whole, that they needed to know and remember, in relation to that subject: in discoursing on which, I shall consider,

I. The question proposed.

II. The answer given to it.

I. The question is put in very general, and seemingly inoffensive, terms; yet probably a great deal of Jewish pride and uncharitableness couched under it. For considering the known spirit of that people in those days, it is obvious to suspect that this busy man's inquiry proceeded from an ill-natured hope of being confirmed in a national persuasion, that God was *not the God of the Gentiles*;* but had reserved future happiness for the Israelites alone. And this is the more likely, both as their own writers distinguish them by the description of a *few*, in opposition to the multitude of mankind;† and as our Saviour, in the sequel of his answer, declares that many Gentiles, from all parts of the earth, should be admitted into the kingdom of Heaven; and many Jews excluded.‡

But supposing there was no ground for imputation either of ill will or vanity; still all such questions, for this is a leading one to many others, are useless and irreverent. To be satisfied indeed, that the Lord and King of all is just and good and wise, we are essentially concerned; for, without it, we could neither honour and love him, nor enjoy any solid comfort within ourselves. And this general truth, our ideas of what infinite perfection must comprehend, and our experience of a right and kind and prudent constitution of things,

* Rom. iii. 29. † See 2 Esdr. viii. 1, 3. Comp. v. 15, 16, and ix. 21, 22. ‡ Luke xiii. 28, 29.

unite to prove to us in a very convincing manner. Since then God is just, he will make none miserable, farther than they deserve: since he is good, he will both pardon and reward, in such degree as is fit: and since he is wise, what appears disorder and confusion to our short sight will appear in the end perfect regularity and proportion. Had we been apprized only of thus much, we could have had no right, however desirable it might have been, to know any thing farther before-hand, even concerning ourselves; for it is enough, that we shall be treated with equity and mercy: much less could we have pleaded any shadow of right to be told, what proportion of our fellow-creatures shall behave well, and be accepted; or ill, and be punished; or why there are not more of the former, and fewer of the latter sort; or any thing of this nature. To do our duty, and trust God with the government of his own world, would be our whole concern.

Supposing him then to place us in a station of much clearer light; which, thanks be to his infinite bounty, he hath done; by adding those important notifications, which we read in Scripture, of what we are to believe and do, to hope and fear: it cannot be, that his voluntary communication of what he might have withheld, should authorise us to demand still more. Undoubtedly new questions, in abundance, may be asked on this new face of things: but who is intitled to ask them? And yet this is not insisted on, because they cannot be answered; for most, if not all of them, may very easily. Why are so many nations without the knowledge or belief of this important revelation? Partly, because Christians have neglected to acquaint them with it, or mixed it with corruptions, or disgraced it with wickedness of life: partly because themselves,

or their ancestors, did not attend to it, when proposed, with such fairness of mind, as they ought, But what then shall become of those nations? Such among them as personally rejected the Gospel, shall be punished in proportion to the wilfulness, or carelessness, that was the cause of their so doing: such as never knew it, shall be at least in no worse a condition for it, perhaps in a better. But as to Christians themselves: Why have so many of them perverted their religion so grievously? And why do so many of a purer profession lead most impure and sinful lives? Partly, because some lay stumbling-blocks, of various kinds, in the way of their brethren: but chiefly, because others turn away their eyes from the light which they might have; or walk not suitably to that, which they actually have. And as, in all these things, there are numberless alleviations or aggravations of guilt: every man shall be treated accordingly: some *beaten with many stripes,* some *with few.** But in particular, what either shall suffer, we neither are told, nor have reason to complain that we are left ignorant; since it will be our own fault, if we suffer any thing at all. *Therefore,* as the second book of Esdras justly exhorts, *Be not thou curious, how the ungodly shall be punished: but inquire how the righteous shall be saved.*†

But questions end not here. Supposing it mens fault, that they obey not the laws of God: why were those laws made so strict? Because a holy Being could not enact any other, nor we be raised by any other to the spiritual happiness, which he designs for us hereafter. The only way therefore was that, which he hath taken: first to set before us a perfect rule of life; then to make every allowance, that is

* Luke xii. 47, 48. † 2 Esdr. ix. 13.

truly equitable, for our falling short of it. But why was our nature formed so liable to fall short of it, in the sad degree that we often do? Why if it had not, an obedience, proportionably exacter, must have been required of us; with less hope of pardon, and heavier punishment for disobedience; as in the case of those *angels, which kept not their first estate.** And whatever advantage it might have been, upon the whole, to inherit all the good dispositions, with which our first parents were framed; unallayed with the bad ones, which they have transmitted to us; we are no more intitled to those advantages, than to the possessions which our ancestors have forfeited, or the strong constitutions which they have destroyed, for their posterity, as well as themselves. In some degree every created nature must be imperfect. And on many accounts, that variety of degrees which we see in the works of God, is fit and useful. We know the reasons in part at least, for which, beings, much lower than us, exist: why may there not then be very sufficient reasons for our being no higher, than we are? And where shall man, or angel, rest contented, if either may claim, as long as God can give? Poor as our condition is here, still it was worthy of the Almighty to place us in it; else it had not been done: for we must allow him, who could make such a world as this, to be a better judge than us, whether it was fit for him to make it, or not. And were it to continue, to its final period, the strange mixture of good and bad, which it is; yet considering the glorious recompence, that going through it well prepares us for, we shall be far from having cause to think hardly, or meanly, of Providence. But we have assurance given us that the days shall come, when *the kingdoms of this world*

* Jude, verse 6.

*shall become the kingdoms of the Lord and his Christ,** in a fuller sense, than they have ever been yet. And perhaps, the times already past may bear only a small proportion to that joyful future season, when religion shall be rightly understood and universally practised, mankind be happy, and God glorified. Blessed are they, that shall live in this state of things: more blessed they, that shall contribute to it.

But, though we ought to attend, carefully and thankfully, to whatever information God gives us, yet all eagerness of knowing more than is revealed, betrays the same wrong turn with that of the enquirer in the text; who, instead of the great question which it concerns every man to ask, and which Christ came on purpose to answer, "what he himself should do to be saved," chose to ask one, which he had no concern in, and therefore could expect no answer to, "How many should be saved." Accordingly our blessed Lord neither satisfied him, nor hath on any other occasion declared, what proportion of the human race shall be happy and what miserable. In one or two places he seems to represent the former as the *least* number:† in the parable of the ten virgins he makes them equal:‡ in that of the servants, there is but one unfaithful;§ in that of the guests invited to supper, but one that *had not on a wedding garment.*‖ And yet to this *last* parable he hath added the reflection, that *many are called and few chosen.* In his own days indeed this was most literally true: and has been too much so ever since. But still St. John foresaw a time, in which one part only of true Christians should be *a great multitude, that no man could number, of*

* Rev. xi. 15. † Matth. xx. 16. ‡ Matth. xxv. 1, 2.
§ Matth. xxv. 15, &c. ‖ Matth. xxii. 11.

*all kindreds and people and tongues:** and the more ancient prophets foretell, that all nations *shall know the Lord,† and all be righteous.*‡ Plainly then it could not be our Saviour's design, upon the whole, to determine the proportion between good and bad; but by a view of their danger, to animate all in the zealous pursuit of that recompence, which, (be the numbers of each what they would) too few obtained, whilst any failed of it: that so, as many as possible might be induced to take the right course; and God be justified, how many soever took the wrong. Therefore as the book of Esdras, already quoted, exhorts, *Ask thou no more questions concerning the multitude of them that perish. For when they had taken liberty, they despised the most High, thought scorn of his law, and forsook his ways. It was not his will, that men should come to nought: but they, which he created, have defiled the name of him that made them, and were unthankful unto him, which prepared life for them.*§ Justly therefore doth our Saviour in the

II. Part of the text, to which I now proceed, refuse to gratify the querist's curiosity, and return an answer entirely practical: that it was not the business of mankind to pry into what God had hid, but mind what he had revealed, and to master another kind of difficulty, that of fulfilling his commands: that multitudes indeed, who professed religion, would finally appear to have professed it in vain; but this was a matter, not to raise idle speculations upon: God would be sure to take care of his behaviour to his creatures; let them take care of their duty to him: whatever number should be saved, great or small, they knew the way, and there was but one, to become part

* Rev. vii. 9. † Jer. xxxi. 34.
‡ Is. lx. 21. § 2 Esdr. viii. 55.—60.

of it: *strive to enter in at the strait gate: for many, I say unto you, shall seek to enter in, and shall not be able.* Not that any Christian shall ever do his best to enter into life, and fail of it: but that many imagine God hath marked out other ways to happiness than obeying his laws; and many too, who are fully sensible there is no other way, use so little diligence in following this, that their progress is insufficient to arrive at eternal felicity.

One fatal mistake of believers in religion hath always been, an absurd notion, that their steady faith in it, their zeal to support and spread that faith, their punctilious observance of certain forms, their constant practice of some precepts, and their periodical pretences of sorrow for having wilfully lived in the neglect of the rest; that one or other of these things would be accepted, instead of true piety and virtue.

No thoroughly good heart indeed can fall into this error: but wrong inclination, joined with ignorance, or what is worse, false instruction, may give it deep root: and our Saviour, as he found it widely spread, took unwearied pains to pluck it up. Immediately after the text he declares, that neither acknowledgment of his authority, nor attendance on his teaching, nor any thing else, shall avail the *workers of iniquity.** And in his sermon on the mount, after stating the duties of mankind in their utmost purity and strictness, he proceeds directly to urge his hearers, in words very little different from those now before us, to a careful performance of them all, however difficult, as the only method of attaining future bliss. *Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction; and many there be which go in thereat; but strait is the*

* Ver. 25, 26, 27.

*gate, and narrow the way, which leadeth unto life; and few there be that find it.** All, who preach other doctrines, he pronounces, in the next words, *false prophets:* all who depend on other hopes, even though they had personally followed him, and wrought miracles in his name, he utterly disowns, and assures them, they have laid their foundation on the sand. Indeed, through the whole of his ministry, he had but one rule, in relation to this matter: *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the Commandments.*† When the twelve, whom he had chosen, came, with great satisfaction, to give him an account of the mighty works they had wrought, and the devils they had cast out, he partakes in their joy; but instantly adds; *Notwithstanding, in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in Heaven:*‡ because by a truly religious frame of mind, you are qualified for that place, whither *shall in no wise enter any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination; but they, which are written in the Lamb's book of life.*§ So perfect was his regard to truth and virtue; that no desire of gaining disciples, no tenderness to the disciples he had, could ever incline him to give any one person the least exemption from the least duty. And if such was their case, never must we indulge imaginations, that ours will be more favourable. Christianity is not an artful contrivance for conveying bad men, who will make use of it, to Heaven, fraudulently; but it is *the doctrine according to godliness:*‖ And its advantage is, not that a Christian needs not be so good a man as another, but that he hath the means of being a better: which whoever fails to be,

* Matth. vii. 13, 14. † Matth. xix. 17. ‡ Luke x. 17—20.
§ Rev. xxi. 27. ‖ 1 Tim. vi. 3.

professes it only to his condemnation. *Know ye not,* saith the Apostle, *that they which run in a race, run all; but one receiveth the prize? So run that ye may obtain.** *And if a man strive for masteries; yet he is not crowned, except he strive lawfully.*† Now there is one law, peculiarly necessary to be observed, if ever we would obtain a crown in the Christian combat; which yet many are strangely prone to overlook, who would seem sincerely desirous to observe all the rest: I mean an humble dependence on God's mercy, procured by the death of our blessed Lord; and on God's assistance, promised in return to our earnest prayers. Pardon is not a debt, but a favour; which the giver may bestow on his own terms. Our sufficiency for doing our duty, is not from ourselves, but from above; nor can we have it unless we ask it: and were we to obey much more perfectly, than we do; it would still be no more, than what we are bound to; and even were that otherwise, eternal rewards cannot be due for temporary services. Presumption in our own strength is destructive to our virtue; confidence of our own merit is injurious to our Maker: but a deep sense of human unworthiness and of divine grace, will inspire us with that lowliness of heart which God will accept, and that vigilance of conduct which he will bless: *This* therefore *is the victory, that overcome the world, even our faith.*‡ But besides all those who through blameable mistakes thus fall into a wrong way; multitudes want courage to set out, or perseverance to continue, in what they know is the right way. For every sinful habit is to be thrown off at the entrance; every virtuous path, however rugged, pursued; every vicious one, however frequented and delightful, shunned throughout

* 1 Cor. ix. 24. † 2 Tim. ii. 5. ‡ 1 John v. 4.

the progress: Thus *strait is the gate,* and thus *narrow the way that leadeth unto life.* Numbers see their duty, wish to perform it, and faintly *seek to enter in;* but not *striving* as they ought, fail in the attempt. Perhaps they even do many things well: and would do all, but for one favourite indulgence, or another, which they cannot resolve to quit: so there they stop short, and are ruined for ever. Some difficulties our very nature produces; wrong education many more; and when those of voluntary custom are added, then the opposition grows formidable indeed. But still our Saviour purposely gives full warning of it, here in general terms; but, through a good part of the next chapter, he specifies particulars; shews, how many things would render men unworthy of *eating bread in the kingdom of God:** and as great multitudes were following him, turns and assures them, they must quit every thing that was dearest, and bear every thing that was hardest to them, when conscience required it, if they meant to be his disciples: bidding them therefore *sit down and count the cost;* consider well, how they should be able to perform what he expected, before they undertook it.† Not that he intended to represent the *one thing needful,*‡ as a matter of indifference; that might be done or omitted, as men should have a higher or lower opinion of their own strength: but, instead of drawing after him, by false expectations, a crowd of unthinking admirers, that would first dishonour, and then perhaps forsake him; he chose to tell them the worst plainly, and at once; that, as they could not but see the importance of obeying God's will, they might see and weigh its difficulties too; and so, with

* Luke xiv. 15. † Ver. 25—33. ‡ Luke x. 42.

deliberate and well-instructed resolution, enter upon the work; which however laborious, is indispensable.

They who have not been thus forewarned, go on indeed with great ease: but it is not in religion, that they go on. Doubtless common decency, and outward regularity, are very valuable things: would God, more attention were paid to them! But still with these there may be little true sense of duty to God, or even man; little care, that the heart and affections be such as they ought; nay much indulgence of very criminal actions, either concealed from the world, or approved by it. In short, almost every thing may be right, in the opinion of those around us, perhaps in our own: and almost every thing wrong in the eyes of our Maker. How great is the need then, that such as are proceeding securely in the broad way, should be told the difference of that which leads unto life! But to others also, strong representations, of the purity of the divine precepts, and of the obstacles that turn men aside from the observance of them, are highly useful: they excite us to search into every branch of our conduct, every secret recess of our souls: they prevent the negligence, that betrays us into danger; and the surprize, that disconcerts and dispirits us at the appearances of it: they keep up our vigilance, put us on exerting all our own strength, and asking more from God: by which means, temptations, that else might have proved fatal, are intirely avoided, or easily overcome.

Timorous and dejected minds indeed may be hurt, by insisting too much on the trials, which they have to go through: to these therefore a different, but yet a consistent, view of things must be presented: and accordingly our Saviour, with the utmost tenderness, invites *all, that are weary and heavy laden, to come*

unto him, and they shall find rest unto their souls: his yoke shall prove *easy to them, and his burthen light:* * in perfect conformity to what had been prophesied of him, that *he should feed his flock like a shepherd; gather the lambs with his arm and carry them in his bosom.* † Religion hath both its severities and its encouragements: and the whole of both must be laid before mankind; but the one or the other dwelt on, as the case requires; that so, some may be alarmed into right conduct, others quieted in it; and neither *the heart of the righteous made sad, whom God hath not made sad;* nor *the hands of the wicked strengthened, by promising him life.* ‡ But undoubtedly the principal need is, of mens being awakened to a sense, that God requires much more, than is usual practised, or even thought of. For superfluous fears, though we ought carefully to guard against them, are, of the two, not near so pernicious as deceitful hopes. It is indeed a very awful consideration that the difficulties of becoming what we should be are so great; and surmounted by so few. But still the truth ought not to be disguised: and the difficulty of doing what may and must be done, is no argument for any thing but unwearied diligence: and for that, it is the strongest argument in the world. That most men act wickedly, is no more an objection against religion; than that most men act unwisely, is against common prudence. That so many fail by taking a wrong course, is only a warning to make sure of taking the right. And if in that, several duties are painful, it is not Christianity, that hath made them so. All its peculiar precepts are easy in themselves, and assistances to the practice of the rest. The hard sayings are declared indeed in the Gospel; but

* Matth. xi. 28, 29, 30. † Is. xl. 11. ‡ Ezek. xiii. 22.

enjoined by reason itself, when duly cultivated, and by the very nature of things. These therefore are unchangeably what they are; and all we have to do, is to submit to them. But if our religion had made the duties of life stricter, it hath made the hopes of assistance and reward so much stronger, that we should have no manner of cause to complain; much less to faint. The temptations to disobey, which arise from our make and circumstances, God himself hath exposed us to; and therefore if we apply to him, will assuredly support us under, to a degree that he will accept. The ill habits which proceed from wrong education only, cannot have got very strong hold; if we begin but to extirpate them, as soon as we come to the government of ourselves. And as for those which, by our voluntary misconduct afterwards, have taken deeper root; since the mischief is of our own doing, we are bound to more pains and more patience in undoing it again. When a long irregularity hath impaired health, a long strictness of regimen will be needful to recover it: but every disease of the soul is curable at length, though many of the body are not. Indeed the severe trials are almost wholly at first; and therefore our Saviour hath peculiarly remarked, that *strait is the gate:* but when once we have contracted our appetites and passions enough, to get through that; the remaining obstacles diminish, usually by quick degrees; and after a while, *the ways of wisdom* become *pleasantness; and all her paths, peace.** Then the difficulties themselves turn into delight, and the happy traveller goes on his way rejoicing; till, the days of his pilgrimage being completed, *Entrance is ministered unto him abundantly into the*

* Prov. iii. 17.

*everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.**

I conclude with the words of a heathen writer; but highly deserving every Christian's attention. "Think of the life of man, as of a long road, leading "towards a holy temple where we are to be initiated "in divine mysteries: a road full of passengers, some "loitering and trifling, some running about, and "hindering one another; some wandering, and "losing themselves. For many are the devious and "deceitful paths, leading to pits and precipices: but "one alone, narrow and steep and rough and trodden "by few, that points directly forwards; which brave "and industrious souls, with great resolution, force "their way through; earnestly longing for the "initiation, and captivated with the beauty of the "place they aspire to: where when they arrive, all "their labour ends, and every desire is fully satisfied. "Begin the journey then: enter and be initiated; "take possession of the good things provided there: "for wishes themselves can extend no farther. †"

* 2 Pet. i. 11. † Max. Tyr. Dissert. 23. Davis, 4to. 39.

SERMON XXIX.

JAMES v. 12.

BUT ABOVE ALL THINGS, MY BRETHREN, SWEAR NOT; NEITHER BY HEAVEN, NEITHER BY THE EARTH, NEITHER BY ANY OTHER OATH: BUT LET YOUR YEA, BE YEA, AND YOUR NAY, NAY; LEST YE FALL INTO CONDEMNATION.

THIS precept of St. James is plainly taken from that part of our Saviour's Sermon on the mount, where just the same prohibition occurs, only expressed more at large, in the following words: *Ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths. But I say unto you, Swear not at all: neither by Heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the Earth, for it is his footstool; neither by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King; neither shalt thou swear by thy head; for thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be yea, yea; nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these, cometh of evil.** These are the only texts of Scripture, where we meet with any command of this kind. And therefore to understand aright, as it greatly concerns us, what the Christian doctrine is in relation to oaths; our business must be to consider well, and compare together these two passages. There is unquestionably a strong ap-

* Matth. v. 33—37.

pearance at first sight, that all oaths without exception are forbidden in them: and it is no wonder, that many have been carried away by that appearance, and held it unlawful to swear upon any occasion. But whoever will examine the matter thoroughly, can hardly fail, I think, to be fully satisfied of the contrary.

That an oath hath no unlawfulness in its own nature, needs very little proof. For what is it? It is acknowledging ourselves to stand in the presence of God, and have him for the witness of what we say: it is declaring ourselves to be sensible, that if we speak falsely, we forfeit his favour; and confessing, that we forfeit it justly. Now these are truths, all of them highly honourable to God: and it cannot be sinful, it is indeed an act of piety and worship, to make a serious profession of them before him. And for the only thing besides, which an oath is taken to imply, that we freely consent to become objects of his anger, if we are not sincere; it must evidently be limited to such consent, as we are capable of giving, to what will equally follow, whether we consent or not. We speak in the same manner on common occasions perpetually; and tell those, to whom we apply, that if such or such a thing, which we say, be not true, we willingly renounce all claim to their friendship. The expression is universally understood, and used without scruple, between men: and it is just as intelligible, and allowable too, when addressed to God.

Oaths therefore, in themselves, are certainly lawful: and farther, they are highly useful also. For men are so extremely prone, both to conceal truth, and to speak untruths, when their passions, or their interests, prompt them to do so; that they have need of the most powerful restraints to keep them from it;

and those to be inforced, in the most affecting manner, on their consciences. Now undoubtedly the thought, that God knows and will avenge it, if we transgress, may awaken and check men, when nothing else can. And the most effectual way of bringing that thought strongly into our minds, is requiring us to make a solemn acknowledgment of it, as in his presence. He is indeed equally present, and equally just, whether we invoke him or not. But it is our sense of his presence and justice, that must influence us: and nothing can possibly either excite or testify that, so completely, as an oath.

It must be owned, great numbers will certainly speak truth without an oath; and too many will not speak it with one. But the generality of mankind are of a middle sort: neither so virtuous, as to be safely trusted, in cases of importance, on their bare word; nor yet so abandoned, as to violate a more solemn engagement. Accordingly we find by experience, that many will boldly say, what they will by no means adventure to swear: and the difference, which they make between these two things, is often indeed much greater, than they should; but still it shews the need of insisting on the strongest security. When once men are under that awful tie, and as the Scripture phrase is, *have bound their souls with a bond,* * it composes their passions, counterbalances their prejudices and interests, makes them mindful of what they promise, and careful what they assert; puts them upon exactness in every circumstance: and circumstances are often very material things. Even the good might be too negligent, and the bad would frequently have no concern at all, about their words; if it were not for the solemnity of this religious act.

* Numb. xxx. 2.

And a farther advantage of it is, that when we have thus had the strongest assurances given us, which we can have, concerning any matter, we are naturally disposed to acquiesce in it: and *an oath for confirmation* becomes *the end of all strife.* *

This practice therefore is of so great consequence, that human society would scarce be kept in tolerable order by any other means. Perhaps indeed a small community, of which every member scrupled taking an oath, may, by strict discipline, subsist for some time without it: and a small sect of such persons in the midst of a larger community, may, under due limitations, be safely excused from it also, whilst they continue sufficiently distinguished from the rest of the world; and whilst the value, which they set on this indulgence, makes them fearful of doing any thing to forfeit it. But were such a permission to become general throughout a large nation, especially one enjoying wealth and commerce and liberty; were all the different sorts of persons in it to be released at once from what they all looked on as their strongest obligation to truth; it is easy to see, that universal confusion must inevitably follow. And there is not any age, or nation of the world, but have shewn, that they were sensible of this. All governments have ever required the most highly esteemed of their subjects, on every fit occasion, to confirm their testimony by an appeal to God: for if it is not demanded of every one who is able to give it with a good conscience, how can it be expected of any?

Not only amongst the heathens therefore, but amongst the holy patriarchs also, from early times, good men have asked, and equally good men have given, the security of an oath. God himself is repre-

* Heb. vi. 16.

sented in Scripture as swearing to men: and men are not only introduced swearing to God; *I have sworn, and am stedfastly purposed to keep thy Commandments;* * but in the law of Moses, they are expressly commanded to *swear by his name* to one another. † Cases are specified, in which *the oath of the Lord shall be between them:* ‡ and it is appointed, that if any man *hear the voice of swearing,* that is, have the form of an oath pronounced to him, as called to be *a witness,* by the magistrate; if he doth not utter upon that oath, what *he hath seen or known* of the matter, *he shall bear his iniquity.* § Nor do the Prophets, though they sometimes improve upon the law, and carry things to a higher degree of purity and strictness, ever mention oaths, but with honour; provided men *swear* as Jeremiah directs, *in truth, in judgment, and in righteousness.* ‖ And far from intimating that under the Messiah this act of religion would become unlawful; they foretell, in passages, which must be understood of the gospel times, that then *unto God every knee shall bow, and every tongue shall swear.* ¶

But as all things are liable to abuse, and few things in religion have escaped it; great abuses in the matter of oaths had prevailed amongst the Jews, before our Saviour's days. Prompted by wicked motives to interpret away the obligation of the third commandment, as far as they could, some of them pretended that swearing to a vain thing meant only swearing to a false one; and therefore made no scruple at all of needless oaths, if they were but true ones. Others, because it was only said, *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain,* thought it very

* Ps. cxix. 106. † Deut. x. 20. ‡ Exod. xxii. 11.
§ Lev. v. 1. ‖ Jer. iv. 2.
¶ Is. xlv. 23. See also xix. 18. and lxv. 16.

lawful, so they did not use that name expressly, to swear when they would, by other forms, however equivalent.* And upon this imagination a yet worse was grafted; that such oaths not being of the sort, to which alone the law related, they were liable to no punishment for breaking them, nor consequently obliged to keep them.† For these notions we find in their writings, preserved to this day. Indeed our Saviour informs us, that in his time they did not conceive all such oaths to be void, but some only. If a man *swore by the altar, it was nothing:* if *by the gift upon it,* that was binding. And other like distinctions without a difference they had; by which the artful could entangle others, and keep themselves free.‡

Such then being the advantages of oaths, and such the Jewish perversions of them; which is it likely, that our blessed Lord intended to forbid; the total use, or the abuse only? Is it credible in the least, that he, *whose kingdom is not of this world,*§ should mean to take away from all the governments of this world, a right, which they had enjoyed from the creation to that day? Can it be imagined, that the greatest lover of mankind, that ever was, would loose the firmest bonds of human society; and make it a part of his reformation of things, to forbid our acknowledging ourselves to speak in the presence of God, and to

* *Philo* περι των εν ειδει νομων. *Lightf.* in *Matth.* v. Amongst the Heathens, *Rhadamanthus* first forbad swearing by the Gods, and directed them to swear by the Goose, and the Dog, the Ram, and the like. *Socrat.* l. 12. *rerum Creticarum in Schol. Aristoph.* in *Av.* which *Eustath.* in *Od.* Γ. p. 1871. *Ed. Rom.* saith he did υπερ τω μη θεων ονομαζειν επι παντων. And *Porphyry de Abst.* l. 3. p. 285. saith Socrates followed this law of Rhadamanthus. Socrates saith in *Plato's Gorgias,* Μα τον κυνα, τον Αιγυπτιων θεον. *Jabl. Panth. Æg.* l. 5. c. i. §. 5. † Lightf. in Matth. v. ‡ Matth. xxiii. 16—22. See Wolf. Matth. v. 35. § John xviii. 36.

incur his displeasure, if we speak falsely? Certainly this was not his intention, if his words can possibly signify any thing else: and I shall proceed to shew you, that they naturally may; indeed, that they must.

It is true, the prohibition is at first view absolute and general: but so are many others in Scripture, and particularly in the sermon on the mount, which yet every one allows to have their limitations in the nature of the thing. The very next prohibition after this, is just as general: *But I say unto you, that ye resist not evil.** Yet on some occasions, and in some ways, we all do and ought to resist it. Another in the next chapter is, *Take therefore no thought for the morrow.*† And a third immediately follows, *Judge not, that ye be not judged.*‡ Here all the world understands our Saviour to speak only of needless thought and rash judgment. And why then should not we understand him to speak of needless and rash swearing; and apprehend, that he chose such comprehensive terms on all these subjects, because there was much occasion to warn men strongly; and in comparison little danger of their failing to make proper exceptions? There is full as much ground in the reason of the case, to think thus of the point before us, as of the rest: and there is farther ground from his words themselves; for they are visibly pointed against the Jewish evasions, which I have just mentioned to you. Some of them imagined, they could not sin by other than false swearing. He therefore tells them, that swearing at all was a sin; meaning, where they could avoid it: but swearing before a magistrate they could not avoid. Some again thought, if God was not named, the oath was harmless. He therefore shews them, that their other common forms were of the

* Matth. v. 39. † Matth. vi. 34. ‡ Matth. vii. 1.

same nature, as if they did name him: for they all referred to him; *Heaven was his throne, Earth his foot-stool, Jerusalem his city;* their *heads* and lives were preserved by his power, not their own.* So that swearing by such things, indeed by any thing, is in effect swearing by God himself: (For *the world is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof:*†) and bringing any part of it into the form of an oath, can have no other sense, than appealing to him, as the disposer of that, and the whole. Now from hence again our Saviour appears not to condemn swearing before an officer of justice; for on such an occasion these forms were never admitted. And what he doth condemn, the words following his prohibition, joined with it, as they ought, shew plainly enough. *Swear not at all: but let your communication be, yea, yea; nay, nay. Communication,* here and elsewhere, means, discourse with one another: as when St. Paul directs, *Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth.*‡ The original word, as well as the English, is the same in both places, and confessedly denotes this. Oaths in common talk therefore are the thing, which our blessed Lord intended to forbid, and nothing else. Had he designed to prohibit more, he would have said, "Swear not at all, but let your answer, even "though a magistrate require an oath of you, be only "yea, yea; and nay, nay." But when he saith only, *Swear not at all, but let your communication,* your usual discourse, consist of naked assertions, and no more; we cannot reasonably extend the first part of his precept beyond the latter; but must understand the case, in which we are forbidden swearing, to be the same with that in which we are confined to bare affirming or denying: which is our daily familiar

* Matth. v. 34, 35, 36. † Psal. l. 12. ‡ Eph. iv. 29.

speech. And a farther confirmation of this, if it needs one, follows in what he adds: *For whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.* Now common swearing can indeed come only of evil. But taking a solemn oath, on affairs of moment, may come, and often doth, from reverence of our Maker, from desire of maintaining peace and justice amongst our fellow-creatures: and actually maintains them in a better degree, than could be done without it.

Our Saviour's words then sufficiently interpret themselves: and they interpret those of the text by necessary consequence. For if he intended only to prohibit common swearing in conversation, St. James, we may be sure, intended no more, than his Master did; especially in words, that are evidently copied from his Master's. If they are without dependence on what comes before and after, we have no other rule to explain them by. And if they are connected with it, the connection leads us to the same sense. In the 8th verse he exhorts to patience under afflictions. In the 9th he cautions against one common mark of wanting it, envying the more prosperous; *Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned.* Then after setting before them examples of patience, in the 10th and 11th; he proceeds, in the 12th, to warn them of another fault, which impatience too frequently produces: *But above all things, my brethren, swear not:* have a peculiar care, that your sufferings and injuries tempt you not to a passionate and profane use of the name of God: nay, *Swear not by Heaven, or by earth, or by any other oath:* do not imagine, that softening and mincing your imprecations will change the nature of them: *but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay:* let your assertions and denials, under the greatest provo-

cations, be mere assertions and denials, without any superadded vehemence of phrase: *lest you fall into condemnation* for irreligious expressions of warmth, as others will for uncharitable repining. We have therefore no manner of reason to think, that St. James disapproved swearing before a magistrate, to which his prohibition of swearing by Heaven and earth cannot possibly relate; or even swearing on any other solemn and needful occasion: but only such oaths, as are apt to break out in common speech, especially from persons under oppression.

And it is very material to observe farther, that the more serious and strict of the Jewish teachers themselves forbid swearing in the same general terms, with our Saviour and St. James. But when they say, as more than one of them doth, that "it is good for a "man not to swear at all;" do they mean, that it is good for him not to swear in cases, where their own law requires that he shall swear? Nay Solomon himself mentions the character of him *that sweareth*, as a blameable one: and of him *that feareth an oath*, as a commendable one.* Doth he mean to contradict Moses, whose law was then in force, and to say no man should take an oath on any exigence whatever? No certainly: but that he ought to avoid it, whenever, consistently with other obligations, it can be avoided. Nay, the Heathen moralists also, at one time seem to prohibit swearing absolutely; and at another interpret their intention to be, that an oath should be used very sparingly.† In short, their words and our Saviour's too, were meant and taken in exactly the same manner, as ours are at present, when at any time we direct a child, or a servant, that

* Eccl. ix. 2. † See the beginning of Serm. 15.

they must be sure never to swear. And there is a most remarkable instance, in the Jewish historian Josephus,* of the necessity of interpreting this rule with some exceptions; though it be laid down in as absolute and strong, terms, as well can be. The Essenes, a sect of that nation, he tells us, had so great an abhorrence of swearing, that they looked upon taking an oath, even as a worse crime than breaking it. And yet these very persons, he informs us but a few lines after, were obliged on their admission into that sect, to take a most solemn oath. And therefore in reality they could condemn only needless ones, however generally they might speak to guard against them the better.

But we have still further evidence, that some oaths remained, after our Saviour's prohibition, as lawful as before. He himself, our faultless pattern, made use of them. When *the High Priest adjured him by the living God,* to say, *if he were the Christ, the Son of the Blessed;* he affirmed upon oath, that he was.† For according to the Jewish manner of swearing in their courts of justice, the magistrate, as I have already observed to you, pronounced the form of the oath: and then the person, brought before him, was understood to speak under the obligation of it. Now to all the questions of the High Priest, before, our blessed Lord had returned no answer: but to this, which he would have answered least of all, if judicial oaths had been contrary to his own precepts, he answers immediately. Nay, we find him uttering a solemn oath, even where the magistrate's authority was not interposed: *Verily I say unto you,* we trans-

* B. J. l. 2. c. 8. §. 6, 7. p. 162, 163. Ed. Haverc.
† Matth. xxvi. 63. 64. Mark xiv. 61. 62.

late it, *there shall be no sign given;* but the original is, *if there shall be a sign given to this generation:** which the learned well know is only an abridgement of the common phrase, "*The Lord do so to me, and* "*more also, if*† this be not true." But, lest any one should alledge, though without a shadow of reason, that our Saviour might exempt himself from what he bound his disciples to; observe farther, that one of the most eminent of them, St. Paul, hath in several of his Epistles made use of one form or another of swearing, on occasions, which he saw were proper: *God is my witness:*‡ *I call God for a record upon my soul:*§ *These things, which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.*‖ And which is yet more, he writes to the Thessalonians thus: *I adjure you by the Lord,* (for the marginal translation is the right one) I lay you under the tie of an oath, *that this Epistle be read to all the holy brethren.*¶ Now is it possible, that he should understand so little, or observe so ill, the rules of that Gospel, which he had learnt from Christ himself by revelation, and received an extraordinary commission of Apostleship to teach, as both to do himself, and oblige others to do, what Christ had forbidden; and even be guilty of it in those very writings, which make part of God's word? Or is not his practice, in these circumstances, an abundantly sufficient commentary on our Saviour's doctrine? We have, besides this, if it were wanted, the testimony of Clement of Alexandria,** a writer of the second century, that St. John gave an assurance upon oath to a young man, whose unhappy case he apprehended to need it.

* Mark viii. 12. † Ruth i. 17. 2 Sam. iii. 35. xix. 13. ‡ Rom. i. 9.
§ 2 Cor. i. 23. ‖ Gal. i. 20. ¶ Thess. v. 27. Ορκιζω ὑμας.
** Lib. Quis dives salvabitur & ap. Euseb. H. E. l. 3. c. 23. Ο δ' εγγυωμενος, ὑπομνυμενος, ως αφεσιν ευρη [σε] ταυ. κ. τ. λ.

What the practice of Christians in the two succeeding ages was, is neither so material, nor quite certain. Some of them perhaps might think that our Saviour had absolutely condemned all swearing.* Others like him might speak against it strongly in general: and yet like him allow of exceptions. But no wonder, if they were seldom willing to swear before Heathen magistrates, because they must usually have sworn by Heathen gods. And therefore Tertullian, who also lived in the second century, acquainted the emperors in his Apology,† what sort of oaths a believer in Christ could take; and what he could not. But as soon as ever Christianity was established, magistrates required this security, and subjects gave it, just as freely as had been done among the Jews before.

All these considerations unite in shewing, that the words of our Saviour and St. James relate only to swearing, without necessity, in discourse. But indeed were there much less to favour this limitation, yet while the state of the world continues such as it is; if questions of importance arise, as they often do, which cannot be decided as they ought, without our testimony, and the magistrates will accept no testimony, except upon oath; how must we act? Must we stand by, and see falsehood and wickedness triumph, and the fortunes and lives of men taken away unjustly, rather than do a thing, confessedly lawful in itself, to prevent it? Or ought we not in such a case to follow the direction, *I will have mercy and not sacrifice;*‡ prefer the moral and unchangeable duty of supporting truth

* Basilides, when newly turned Christian, and required by his fellow-soldiers to take an Oath, μη εξειναι αυτω παραπαν ομνυναι διαβεβαιουτο· χριστιανον γαρ υπαρχειν. Euseb. H. E. l. 6. c. 5.

† C. 32. Sed & juramus, sicut non per Genois Cæsarum, sic per salutem eorum, quæ augustior est omnibus Geniis.

‡ Hos. vi. 6. Matth. ix. 13. xii. 7.

and right before the positive and mutable one, if it were one, of abstaining from an oath?

But the case of oaths not imposed by the magistrate, is very different. And we ought to be extremely cautious about them, and manifest a strong reluctance to take them. It is true, our Saviour's prohibition is only of swearing in common discourse: and what we deliberately assert on occurrences of more than ordinary moment, is of a nature very superior to common discourse: for which reason, and especially since he and his Apostles did on such occasions make use of oaths, it is not always unlawful for us to do so too. But it is much more expedient and prudent; it shews a far higher reverence of the name of God, and a more pious fear of transgressing; it is keeping ourselves from the appearance, from the borders of evil; from becoming guilty insensibly, and then more and more guilty; resolutely to avoid such oaths, whenever we possibly can; and most men may avoid them intirely. It happens exceedingly seldom, to very few of us, that our sincerity cannot be sufficiently evidenced, if we will, by other methods of making it believed, that will appear abundantly worthy of credit; without the awful solemnity of an appeal to God, which ought to be sacredly reserved for emergencies of uncommon necessity.

Thus I have endeavoured to shew you, how far oaths are lawful. And the subject is material enough to be thus enlarged on, were it only for the three following reasons: that Christianity may not lie under the imputation, for a heavy one it would be, of censuring as criminal, what the welfare of society makes indispensable: that the whole body of its professors may not be accused of authorizing the trans-

gressions of one of its fundamental precepts: and that none of you in particular, if at any time called to give your testimony in a legal manner, may do it with a conscience doubtful, whether you do well or ill: *for whatsoever is not of faith, is sin.** But a fourth use may be, to lay open the error of some, who imagine themselves led more immediately, than others, by the Spirit of God within them: but indeed are led, in this matter at least, by mistaken appearances, to condemn what Scripture hath not condemned, and the good of mankind requires to be practised. Only you will remember that though the consequences of their opinion, were it to prevail, would be extremely hurtful; yet they cannot intend those consequences: for that would be intending harm to themselves, as well as others.

There is yet one more, and a very serious use, to be made of the doctrine you have heard: that if the bond of an oath, on fit occasions, be of such importance to society; since an awful regard to God is what gives to all the oaths their whole force and efficacy, that regard should be cultivated with the utmost care; whatever may lessen it, discountenanced; whatever may augment it, encouraged: else, besides losing all the direction and the comfort, which religion gives to well-disposed persons; all the restraint which it lays on others, will be lost too: and the dread of an almighty Avenger being taken away, the most sacred of obligations will become no better, than a more effectual means of committing injustice. Human laws will soon prove too weak, when those of Heaven are cast off: *every one will do what is right in his own eyes,*† and every man's hand be against

* Rom. xiv. 23. † Judges xvii. 6. xxi. 25.

his brother. Therefore diligently preserve the reverence of God strong upon your own hearts, and the hearts of all who belong to you: for *the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom: a good understanding have they, that do thereafter: the praise of it endureth for ever.**

* Ps. cxi. 10.

SERMON XXX.

EXOD. xx. 7.

THOU SHALT NOT TAKE THE NAME OF THE LORD THY GOD IN VAIN: FOR THE LORD WILL NOT HOLD HIM GUILTLESS, THAT TAKETH HIS NAME IN VAIN.

HAVING already shewn, that the Christian religion hath not forbidden the use of all oaths: it is natural to consider distinctly, in the next place, those kinds of oaths, which are forbidden. And I have chosen to speak of this matter from the third Commandment: which would have been of very small significancy under the Gospel, as it only prohibits swearing in vain, if our Saviour, by a subsequent law, had prohibited swearing at all. But as you have now seen that he doth not, it still continues to be of the same force and weight, as when it was delivered at first, from the mouth of God himself, with that awful solemnity, which you may read in the chapter before the text: when *the Lord descended upon Mount Sinai in fire; with thunders and lightenings, and the voice of a trumpet exceeding loud, and the smoke thereof ascended as the smoke of a furnace, and the whole mountain quaked greatly.** *And the Lord spake with a great voice, unto all the assembly out of the midst of the fire, of the cloud and of the thick darkness, these words,*† which I have laid before you.

* Exod. xix. 16, 18. † Deut. v. 22.

Precepts, delivered in such a manner, we may be sure God will expect us to obey with more than ordinary care: and therefore we are deeply concerned to acquaint ourselves with the import and extent of them. Now the words of this Commandment are very comprehensive. For, as *vanity* signifies in Scripture language, both what hath no being; and what is of no importance, and therefore is considered as if it had no being; so applying the name of God *to vanity*, (which is the most literal translation of the words rendered, *taking it in vain*) signifies of consequence giving testimony upon oath, either to what is not, or to what in comparison is nothing: that is, either to falsehoods, or to trifles. Undoubtedly swearing to falsehoods is the chief thing forbidden here; and by some hath been thought the only one. But as the words of the prohibition fairly comprehend swearing to trifles also; and as the oldest translations and most learned of the Jewish writers have understood them to comprehend it; and especially, as our Saviour, hath established this latitude of the phrase by his own interpretation of it: we are certainly to consider them, as taking in both senses. I shall therefore treat of this Commandment first as forbidding false oaths: and afterwards, as forbidding needless and common ones.

Now oaths are of two sorts: either such, as affirm or deny somewhat concerning past or present matters, and are called assertory: or such as engage and give assurance concerning time to come, and are called promissory. To begin with the former.

If ever we assert any thing upon oath, which we know or believe to be false: if we deny any thing, which we know or believe to be true: if we either affirm, or deny, in matters, of which we do know

nothing: or if, in matters, of which we do know something, we speak beyond our knowledge; declaring ourselves to be certain of what we only believe; or to believe firmly what we only suspect and guess: every one of these things, in its different degree, is profaning the name of God to attest a falsehood. And farther, if, when we are sworn to tell the whole truth, we conceal designedly any part of it, which we think may be of moment; here again we are guilty of breaking our oath. Nay indeed, though we are not sworn to tell the whole, yet we should observe, that the only reason of giving evidence at all is, that right may be done; and suppressing a truth may sometimes as intirely mislead and deceive, as telling the grossest falsehood. In short then, if we use any method whatever, be it aggravating, or be it palliating, to disguise the real state of the case: if we relate it in any other manner whatever, than the fairest and plainest we can, after diligently recollecting and considering well; every such artifice amounts to a violation of this great law of God.

And if witnesses ought to observe such impartiality; you will easily apprehend, that jurymen and judges are at least equally bound to it: for they are not only upon oath too, but appointed, and intrusted by public authority: and if any thing influences them, but a steady regard to truth; what should be the security of justice, becomes an instrument of oppression: *judgment,* as the Scripture expresses it, *is turned into gall; and the fruit of righteousness into hemlock.** Indeed whoever hath sworn to speak and determine uprightly, and permits himself to be in any way biassed; though he should happen to do right, yet since he was disposed to have done the same thing,

* Amos vi. 12.

though it had been wrong; is perjured in his intention, though in the particular fact he may not.

And greatly akin to the guilt of being perjured, ourselves, nay often as bad, and sometimes worse, if possible, is that of inducing others to be perjured: a sin which is committed, not only by direct hiring of them to swear falsehoods; but by awing and intimidating; by courting and flattering; by intimating advantages to them, if they can truly swear so and so; by talking them into a persuasion of what they were not fully persuaded of before; and thus making them strain hard to believe, that they know or remember more or less, than they do. Another way, and a very wicked one, of making witnesses forswear themselves is, when artful men contrive, that they shall use forms of words, of which they do not thoroughly understand the import: or disconcert them so on their appearance in a court of justice, by improper treatment of them; and astonish and confound them in such a manner, by a multiplicity of captious questions: that they hinder them from speaking the truth which they intended, or drive them into saying falsehoods which they did not intend.

And if it be sinful, by any such methods, to make witnesses bear false testimony: it cannot be innocent, by unfair suggestions, and false colours put on facts or laws, to procure a wrong verdict or sentence. Let any one suppose himself a sufferer by unjust representations of a case, and he will strongly feel, how bad they are. Surely then he cannot indeed think them allowable, merely because he is a gainer by them.

It is very true, that in all these matters, which I have mentioned, sometimes interest, sometimes prepossession, blinds people to a strange degree. But therefore it is their duty, and should be their busi-

ness, to watch themselves: for no inducement whatever can justify speaking or acting against truth. Be it affection ever so well-grounded, be it resentment ever so just, be it zeal for a party, civil or religious, which we think it ever so needful to support; be it respect for the great and powerful, compassion for the poor and distressed; be it in a word, what it will, that turns men aside in judgment from justice and equity; he who testifies or determines on such motives testifies or determines against his oath. And because men are often influenced by these things, without seeing it distinctly; whoever is called upon to bear any part in judicial affairs, ought to examine himself beforehand with due care; and purify his heart from whatever dispositions may corrupt his integrity.

But there are some occasions, on which doing so is peculiarly requisite. If, for instance, a case, depending at present, may be likely to prove our own case hereafter, or even appears to have any connexion with it: we are strongly tempted to incline a little, perhaps more than a little, to the side, that makes for us; and imagine, there cannot be much harm in that: whilst yet we hold those in the utmost abhorrence, who are but equally partial on the other side. And if we have any motive, that looks of a more generous kind; if it may promote a good cause, if it may serve a friend, or a neighbour, if it may relieve in what seems a hard case; then we are apt to think it meritorious to transgress. But indeed no cause is so good, as that of a constant adherence to truth and right: and if we depart from it, for what we imagine a valuable end; we teach and provoke others to depart from it, for what they imagine such: and God knows then, who may prove the greatest sufferers at last.

As for the plea of good nature on these occasions; it is never a true good nature. For, in all trials of property, shewing any undue favour to one side, is doing just so much hardship to the opposite: and in all trials for crimes, whatever is unfairly done for the advantage of the person accused, is done equally to the disadvantage of public order and safety. And though possibly both some cases and laws, may seem and be hard ones; yet this is the concern of the legislative and regal authority, not ours: and though it be very laudable to obtain, if we can by proper means, a mitigation of the sentence, and even a change of the law itself, when it is requisite; we can never be at liberty, while it continues in force, to elude and defeat it, by false evidence or wrong determinations. If we were, every one's fancy would soon become the rule of his whole behaviour.

There is indeed one thing, that looks a little plausible, urged in favour of such practices; but it may be urged, as well, for almost any sort of dishonesty in the world: that if we scruple a small matter of unfairness, our adversaries will not; and if they take all advantages, we must too; else we are not upon even ground. But in general, sincerity and integrity, with a moderate share of prudence, will do more than set us on even ground. *He that walketh uprightly, walketh surely.** His method of acting will be consistent, his character will be his advocate and evidence: whilst artful knavery will only entangle and discredit itself. But when this proves otherwise, as it sometimes may; our true wisdom is, to be content it should: to support ourselves with the testimony of a good conscience; and look forward to the approaching hour, when it shall be amply rewarded.

Such then is our duty with respect to oaths, in every

* Prov. x. 9.

part of judicial proceedings: and performing it faithfully is a matter of such unspeakable importance, to the fortunes, the reputations, the liberties, the lives of men, that all ages and nations have shewn a strong sense of it, and made provision accordingly. The Jewish Law hath expressly directed: *If a false witness rise up against any man, to testify against him that which is wrong: then shall ye do unto him, as he had thought to have done unto his brother, and thine eye shall not pity.** The laws of some other countries indeed have not gone so far: yet the mildest have shewn a detestation, both of perjured evidences and perjured judges. And however penalties, enacted by men, may be avoided; the judgments denounced by God cannot: whose word hath declared: *A false witness shall not be unpunished; and he that speaketh lies, shall not escape.*† *Woe unto them, that justify the wicked for reward; and take away the righteousness of the righteous from him.*‡ *He that justifieth the wicked, and he that condemneth the just, even they both are an abomination to the Lord.*§

If indeed men give false evidence without designing it, through unavoidable mistake or forgetfulness; they deserve compassion, and not censure. And if they should fail a little in the due care of recollecting; or even should be a little warped by unperceived prejudices: this, though highly blamable, falls very short of deliberate perjury. And the more dreadful that crime is, the more cautious we should be, not only of committing it ourselves, but of imputing it rashly to our neighbours. Let us therefore so judge one another, as remembering, that God will judge us all.

I shall only add, under this head, that assertions

* Deut. xix. 16, 19, 21.
† Prov. xix. 5.
‡ Is. v. 21, 23.
§ Prov. xvii. 15.

upon oath, which are not before a magistrate, but in a private way between two parties, though there is very seldom occasion for them, yet whenever we do make them, require, as much as others, the strictest veracity: and will subject us, to equal punishment, though not from our fellow-creatures, yet from our Maker, if we employ them to mislead those, whom we profess to inform.

The second sort of oaths, mentioned in the beginning, are promissory ones: by which we give assurance of our doing, or abstaining from, such and such things hereafter. Now these again are scarce ever needful, and consequently scarce ever allowable; excepting where the law of God or man prescribes them. But when they are taken, their obligation is not at all the less for their being taken unnecessarily. And therefore let us inquire how far it extends. In the first place then, men forswear themselves, whenever they swear to do any thing, which they know they cannot do; as for instance, to execute an office, for which they are sensible they have not abilities or leisure. Indeed, if they only believe they cannot, or have no sufficient reason to think they can, and yet absolutely and unconditionally swear, that they will, their oath is plainly deceitful; and may occasion pernicious disappointments in the affairs, with which, on the credit of it, they are intrusted. Nor doth it acquit them, if unexpectedly they should afterwards prove able to do, what they thought at the time they were not: as on the other hand, it doth not make men guilty, if they should not prove able to do, what they had grounds to think they were: for in every thing human, allowance is made of course for some degree of uncertainty; and therefore needs not always be expressed. Again, if we promise any thing upon

oath, which though we can do, we do not firmly intend to do, this is very gross perjury: for our own intentions we could not but know; and therefore it is wilful wickedness to swear contrary to them. Nay lastly, how well soever we might once intend; if we are wanting at any time afterwards in due care to make our promise good; we violate our engagement. For we give assurance, not only of our present purpose, but of our future endeavours too: and therefore of our actual performance, if we have it in our power. So far as indeed we have not, our obligation ceases; or rather, is suspended, whilst the incapacity continues. For if ever we become able to do, what before we were not; and the circumstances of the case remain at all the same, as when we obliged ourselves; undoubtedly we are still obliged.

But suppose we have sworn to do a thing, which is within our power, but contrary to our duty: what is incumbent on us then? Why, certainly taking such an oath, knowing or even suspecting it to be such, was a great sin. But performing it, instead of atoning for that sin, would only add a second, and perhaps, in some respects, a greater, to it. We have promised what we had no right to promise, and a prior engagement to observe the laws of God, renders this void from the beginning. But then, if only some part or circumstance of it, be unlawful; we are firmly bound to perform the rest; indeed to come as near the whole, as, consistently with other duties, we can: and make as good amends, as we are able, to those, who may innocently suffer by our failure.

You will easily apprehend from this, that if we have promised any thing upon oath, which we can do lawfully; but cannot do without forfeiting some considerable advantage, or undergoing some considerable

expence or loss: we are by no means absolved from it on that account. For it is a known part of the character of the man, *who shall dwell in the tabernacle of the Lord, and rest upon his holy hill;* that *he sweareth to his neighbour, and disappointeth him not, though it were to his own hindrance.** If indeed we were not of sufficient understanding, when we made the promise; if we were deceived or mistaken in any thing essential to it; if it was not originally intended to bind us in circumstances, like those which have happened since, though perhaps they were not particularly excepted beforehand: if any one of these things be undeniably true, we are not bound. Again, if the person, to whom we have engaged ourselves, release us; or if, where we cannot expect an express notification that he doth, there be full reason to presume it; then also we are at liberty. And this last is the case of some vows to God. We ought to make none rashly: but such as we have made, we ought to keep; unless we have ground to think, it is not his will, that we should. And we ought to suppose it is his will, if they neither contradict any of our duties in life, nor on the whole increase our temptations: above all, if they help us to abstain from sin, and improve in virtue. But if our vow be absurd, and unworthy of him, to whom we offer it; fitted only to load us with difficulties, and ensnare us into transgressions; nor is likely ever to have any better effect; and if this be not merely the language of our inclinations, but the dictate of our best judgment, and that of other serious and able persons; we may well conclude, it was never accepted and ratified by our Maker, but on the contrary displeasing to him: and therefore is neither necessary,

* Psal. xv. 1, 5.

nor proper to be observed by us. But if, in any of these cases abovementioned, any real cause of doubt appear, the punctual and disinterested side is ever the safest. For to him, that *despiseth the oath,* and *breaketh the covenant, thus saith the Lord God: as I live, surely mine oath that he hath despised, and my covenant that he hath broken, I will recompense it upon his own head.**

Such then is the obligation of promissory oaths: into which obligation we all enter, though not in common legal form, yet in real effect, by the vow of our baptism, and we acknowledge it by every subsequent act of religion. Every time therefore that we worship God, or in any other way profess ourselves to be Christians, we bind ourselves to every act of Christian duty. But, to speak only of worldly affairs: they, in the first place, are under this tie, who promise faith and allegiance, as good subjects to the king. If any doubt of his title to it, they ought to apply for what they may soon have, better instruction. If they remain unsatisfied, they ought to refuse the oath: and if they do so on a principle of conscience, though an erroneous one, they deserve pity and esteem. But whoever takes it contrary to his belief, and contrary to his intention, is a profligate.

In the next place, they ought frequently to consider the nature of this obligation, who have promised due execution of justice, as magistrates: faithful discharge of their trust, as officers: diligence in teaching and exemplary lives, as ministers of God's word. And lastly, it extends to all, who in their private capacity solemnly engage themselves to each other, either in the more important relations of life, particularly that nearest one of marriage; or indeed on any occasion

* Ezek. xvii. 18, 19.

whatever. For though some occasions may be much too slight to justify an oath; yet, when we have given it, the Lord is witness, if we fail to perform according to the words we have spoken.

And now it must be observed further, concerning all oaths, that they are ever to be taken in their plain sense, and that in which we are understood to take them: for to have any other in reserve, is only to mislead and deceive, under pretence of giving information and assurance. If the oath be a voluntary one, which we have framed ourselves; it can have no ambiguity, but what is of our own making: and if we make it on purpose to take advantage of it, we are deliberately and shockingly wicked. Indeed when the words are prescribed us by others, by authority for instance, if they are fairly capable of two senses, and it no way appears which was meant; we may certainly use them in either. But this will very seldom happen: and to invent forced and strained interpretations, to evade binding ourselves whilst we seem to do it, is if possible, worse of the two, than flat perjury without any evasion: for he is undoubtedly the most thorough sinner, who is so with the most art and contrivance.

Some perhaps may imagine, that on certain occasions, oaths are become, by custom, insignificant. And it must be owned, that custom frequently alters the sense of expressions in common conversation; and sometimes brings them by degrees to be mere words of course. But solemn assertions or promises, above all upon oath, are much too serious affairs to have their meaning changed, or sunk into nothing, by the caprice and fancy of the world, which governs in trifling talk. Appealing to God, in the nature of the thing, can never be a matter of form only. And the more there are, who, in any case, treat it as such;

the more there are, whom *the Lord will not hold him guiltless.* * For when this awful tie is once come to be carelessly and habitually broken, in any one instance, be it what it will, there is a broad way set open, to break it in every other. And though, for a while, men may forswear themselves without fear on one occasion, and yet scruple it on another; they will soon discover, that the difference cannot be exceeding great: and accordingly, first one step farther will be taken, then another; they that see this, will imitate and go beyond it; and at length general confusion will be the consequence. For we cannot subsist without placing confidence in each other: and the firmest bond of confidence are oaths. If therefore they lose their credit: mutual trust will cease, or become as pernicious, as mutual diffidence; and mischief will follow, without bounds and without remedy.

Nor are these dreadful evils by any means the only aggravation of this sin. Scarce any other affronts and dares God so immediately and directly. For the perjured man renounces his mercy to his face; and openly calls upon him to execute his anger, if he will. Besides, natural inclinations, the growth of our very frame, prompt us to most sins that we commit, and disguise them to our view under specious appearances. But every principle within us, till we stupify them all, revolts at the very thought of perjury. The advantages, that men gain by it, may indeed be extremely pleasing; but they cannot fail to be shocked originally at this manner of gaining them; and therefore, if they use it, must act in full opposition both to their consciences and their hearts. Of other instances of wickedness the world is apt to think very favourably; and indulge and encourage those that practise them.

* Exod. xx. 7.

But a man wilfully forsworn is an object of universal abhorrence. He deserves to be so in all cases: he is so in most: and if in any, a person, that is known to be such, can be looked on with the same eye, as his neighbours; just in the degree that this prevails, human society tends to a dissolution.

Every member of it therefore is concerned to express his detestation of so impious and destructive a crime. Law-makers ought to enact the most effectual provisions against it: magistrates ought to put them in execution, with peculiar vigour: and every method should be taken, to render the imagination of such wickedness alarming to men. One method of unspeakable use, would be, to administer oaths with great solemnity; a thing shamefully neglected amongst us: another, of which we are equally unmindful, to appoint as few of them as possible. Oaths, given and taken frequently, will be given and taken irreverently: till at last multitudes will regard them very little more, than they do common swearing in their daily conversation. But especially they should be spared, where if they are not, interest will be perpetually tempting men to use them falsely, or procure others to do it in their stead. Else, great numbers will be drawn into a dreadful sin, of which otherwise they would never have thought; and being conscious to themselves of having often transgressed so sacred an obligation, will make less difficulty of transgressing others also. The intent of subjecting men to such oaths, will be answered very imperfectly and unequally: the bad will be gainers by perjury: and the good be put under heavy disadvantages, perhaps be ruined, because they dare not incur the same guilt. These are plain reasons why swearing should never be required by law

from those, whose property, or any other favourite interest, is concerned, if it can be avoided.

Yet still, when such oaths are prescribed, though unnecessarily and imprudently, it may be impossible for either business or justice to go on, unless they are administered. But both Scripture and common reason dictate, that no one ought to take them, who cannot do it with the utmost sincerity. And therefore if our state of life be such, that we cannot refuse them without suffering by the refusal, we must either change it for another, not liable to the same inconvenience; or bear patiently what a good conscience brings upon us, and a good God will reward us for.

I must not conclude, without begging you to observe, that the rules, which have been laid down, concerning assertions and promises on oath, hold good concerning other assertions and promises too: and how crying a sin soever falsehood is in the former, falsehood in the latter is the very next to it; hath the same bad effects of destroying faith and trust amongst men, though in somewhat a lower degree; and the opportunities for it are so much more frequent, that a liar, who never swore in his life, may, by often repeating this lesser crime, be more guilty on the whole, than even the perjured wretch, whom perhaps he holds in abhorrence. Remember then, that whether you call upon God to be witness of what you say, or not; he is witness. And it is presumptuous wickedness, to utter an untruth in the presence of the God of truth. For *lying lips are abomination to the Lord: but they that deal truly, are his delight.**

* Prov. xii. 22.

SERMON XXXI.

EXOD. xx. 7.

THOU SHALT NOT TAKE THE NAME OF THE LORD THY GOD IN VAIN: FOR THE LORD WILL NOT HOLD HIM GUILTLESS THAT TAKETH HIS NAME IN VAIN.

I HAVE already observed to you from these words, that the phrase of *taking the name of God in vain*, strictly translated, expresses taking and joining it to *vanity*: and that *vanity* in scripture language means either what is not, or what, being of small consequence, may be considered as if it were not. So that the prohibition of swearing in vain, or to vanity, comprehends both swearing to what hath no truth in it, and to what is of no sufficient importance. Having therefore laid before you the nature and guilt of the former of these crimes, I shall now speak of the latter; and shew you the sinfulness of oaths, and imprecations, and every thing approaching towards them, in common discourse. I am very sensible, that scarce any thing can be said on this subject, but what you have often heard, and know perfectly well beforehand. And it is a great aggravation of men's wickedness, that they will transgress, where they cannot plead ignorance. Perhaps there never was a preacher yet, that hath not publicly warned his hearers against profane swearing: perhaps there never was a person guilty of it, that hath not been told of his faults in pri-

vate too. Yet how little the effect hath been, your own ears may inform you so abundantly every day, that no one can imagine it needless to say more on this head. Useless indeed they may apprehend it will prove to great numbers. But were that a reason for being silent on any point of doctrine, think with yourselves (and a sad thought it is) what one point would there remain for us to speak upon? Undoubtedly we should preach the word of God with much more comfort, if we saw a prospect of doing it with more success. But be our hope of that ever so low, we must preach every part of it; and you must regard, or disregard it, as you please, and take the consequences. Our commission is the same with that of the Prophet; *Son of man, go unto the children of thy people and speak my words unto them, and tell them, thus saith the Lord God, whether they will hear, or whether they will forbear.** Did only the lower part of mankind use his name irreverently; yet they are the bulk of mankind; and their present and future happiness ought to be of as much concern to themselves, and to us, as that of their betters. But if their betters also rival them, often but too successfully, in the shocking competition of profane language; if that sex, on whom it sits the worst, are not intirely free from it; and even those persons, who are seldom guilty of it themselves, by no means take sufficient care to restrain it in others; the necessity of giving frequent cautions against it from the pulpit becomes proportionably greater.

In discharge of this obligation therefore, I beg you to observe concerning all such expressions,

I. That God hath absolutely forbidden them.

* Ezek. iii. 10, 11.

II. That there are many strong reasons, why he should.

III. That Heathens, as well as Jews and Christians, have condemned them.

IV. That no plea of any weight can be made in favour of them.

V. That all may, if they will, easily abstain from them.

Were all men disposed as they ought to be, one should think it might be enough of itself, that our Maker hath absolutely forbidden the unnecessary use of his name. The words of the text are extremely plain: you hear them read every Lord's day: and you pray to him as often as you hear them, that he would *incline your hearts to keep this law.* Then the words of our blessed Lord in the Gospel, are so exceeding strong against needless oaths, that rather than not condemn them effectually, he hath chosen to speak, as if he condemned all oaths. And for imprecations, no precept in the world ever was more express, than that of the Apostle against them: *Bless and curse not.** What shall we say then? Do we allow, that God hath a right to rule us, or do we deny it? You will not say, he cannot forbid common swearing and cursing: and surely, if he can, he hath. You will not say, that this sort of language is a duty: why then do not the prohibitions of Scripture make it a sin? Suppose you could perceive no manner of harm in the practice, doth not God know better? And is it no harm to do, what he hath said you shall not do? Suppose he intends it only for a trial and exercise of your obedience: is that a reason, why you should disobey? Would you bear that a child or a servant should treat you so? And can it be fit treatment then

* Rom. xii. 14.

of the Father and Lord of all? Surely, when once his will is declared, that alone may be sufficient to regulate our behaviour; and it doth not look well to be very exact in demanding to know why, before we submit.

However, that you may see this obligation in a yet fuller light; and that religion may suffer no imputation of imposing arbitrary commands in the present case; I proceed to shew you,

II. That there are strong reasons for the precept now before us: which you will soon discern, if you think but a little of the nature and tendency of the manner of speaking, which it forbids. God is a being to whom the very highest of his creatures owe all possible regard and honour. And certainly our low condition and many sins, ought not to lessen, but increase it. Both our virtue, and our happiness here and hereafter, depend on preserving sacredly in our minds a veneration for our Creator, such as may influence every action and thought. Can it then be allowed to intermix *his holy and reverend name** with all the trifles and all the follies, of our common talk: to use that as an instrument for venting our sinful anger, for confirming every idle assertion we are pleased to utter, for making our discourse appear more lively and humorous? Can it be fit, we should embellish every silly and affected exclamation of ours with the name of God and his Christ; and introduce the mention of his meritorious death, of the wounds which he received, and the blood which he shed, for our redemption, on such shameful occasions, as men daily do? Think only, what sort of things they are, to which you sometimes hear the Lord of Heaven and earth invoked to be a voucher: things, which men would be ashamed to

* Psal. cxi. 9.

hint at in the presence of an earthly superior: and yet the great God is called upon, familiarly and without scruple, to attend to them; called upon sometimes to bear witness, that we resolve to do, what we know he hath forbidden on pain of Hell fire. Be assured he is a witness, and will be an avenger too. *The Lord our God is a jealous God**. And he cannot suffer the honour of that *Name* to be prostituted thus, which he hath commanded us to pray may be sanctified and *hallowed.*

Should he permit it, piety and virtue would be lost from off the earth. For if men make free in this manner with the most sacred of all things; talk of God and his terrors in jest; and call down his wrath, in this world and the next, on themselves and one another, for nothing, some of them almost as often as they speak; what possibility is there, that any real sense of duty should remain amongst them? Did you ever know a common swearer, that was in earnest religious? It cannot be. Either the fear of God will keep him from this practice, or this practice will wear out of his mind the fear of God. That awfulness, which surrounds and guards religion, will be turned into scorn, by taking such liberties with the most important articles of it. Consider: to swear is to acknowledge the perfection of God, to pay him an act of worship and homage. Oaths are consecrated by him to serve, on fit occasions, to this purpose only. What a crime must it be then, to debase them to such mean and vile uses, as multitudes do! Suppose any other act of worship were treated in the same manner, and profaned every hour, carelessly, and even in mockery; how would this appear to you, and what must

* Exod. xx. 5.

the consequence be? Now let such impiety be as shocking as it will; that of common swearing is in its nature full as shocking: and it is dreadful, that men are so habituated to it, as not to feel it.

But farther: when men are once grown fearless enough to break this known and plain law of duty; what principles have they to deter them from breaking any other? When the reverence of God is so effaced from their hearts, that they can use his name with disregard and contempt; what hope or thought can there be left in them of pleasing him? and where then is the security of their not going on to offend him by whatever additional sins they chance to like? Undoubtedly there are those who will swear, and yet will not commit some other sorts of wickedness. But there are few, if any perhaps, that will swear, and yet will commit no other sort of wickedness. And there are many, that began with this transgression only; but when once the breach in their conscience was made, it soon widened, and they admitted through it, by degrees, all the vileness in the world. He therefore, that would not expose himself to become profligate in all respects, must beware of becoming so in this. And they, that would not have their children or servants scruple nothing, must take care they shall scruple swearing. For this is generally one of the first steps which they take towards complete worthlessness. And they go on afterwards much the faster, for another reason. While they dislike profane language, they are unqualified for profane company. Execrations and blasphemies make them tremble, and keep them at a distance from the abandoned. But if these things lose their horror, that barrier is removed, and they are easily drawn in to contract intimacies with those, who

often *make them,* in a little time, as our Saviour expresseth it, *two-fold more the children of Hell, than themselves*.*

Thus doth common swearing lead to all wickedness: but it leads peculiarly to that of false swearing. *In a multitude of words,* the wise man observes, *there wanteth not sin*†. And in a multitude of oaths, there will never want perjury. The less of it any one runs into, who throws the name of God out of his mouth at random, the greater his good fortune is: but as the boldest swearers are almost constantly the freest talkers too; and call Heaven to witness the most plentifully, just at those times when they speak with the least consideration and government of their tongues; they cannot avoid being guilty of false oaths perpetually. And, let any one of them speak his conscience, he must own he hath been perjured a thousand times. Perhaps he will plead, that he was not in earnest. And were that always true, though I believe it is not, far from it, in any one such person's case in the world; yet is perjury a matter to jest with? Are invocations of God, solemn vows and imprecations, things for men to cast wantonly around them, and *say, Am I not in sport?*‡ Remember, he, with whom you take these liberties, hath made no allowance for them in his word, nor consequently will make any at the great day. The rule of his law is express: *Ye shall not swear by my name falsely; neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the Lord*§. And we have no manner of intimation, that this command is to give way, as often as we think proper to divert ourselves with transgressing it. Besides, there is

* Matth. xxiii. 16. † Prov. x. 19. ‡ Prov. xxvi. 19. § Lev. xix. 12.

but a step, and it is easily made, from swearing falsely in jest, or half earnest, to doing the same thing in downright earnest. Taking oaths too frequently, and with too little solemnity, even before legal officers, is acknowledged to diminish the reverence due to them. What must it do then, to use them continually in common conversation, without any ceremony at all? And how can it be expected, that a man, who without the least fear of God, or regard to truth, swears a hundred times over to whatever comes uppermost one hour, shall perhaps the very next, (provided you change the scene) become superior to every thing that would corrupt his integrity in bearing testimony? It will doubtless be said to this, that a man's honour sufficiently binds him to veracity, when he gives his solemn oath, let his sense of religion be as little as it will. But what if he can hope to avoid discovery, and save his honour? What if he prefers his interest before his honour? What if he thinks forswearing himself, on some occasions, no breach of his honour, perhaps a point of honour? What shall bind him then, if the fear of profaning God's name doth not? But still, it must be owned, you will say, that many common swearers are men of truth and probity. Why some, we acknowledge, are: and great pity it is, that such as they, will be common swearers. But if this practice doth not lead every one into deliberate perjury, is it not enough that it leads many, that it tempts and endangers all the rest; and that they cannot know beforehand, how great the danger may, at one time or other, prove? He that is swearing and vowing continually, it must happen, that sooner or later, he will swear to do something unlawful. What a snare now is this! It is a sin to have taken such an oath: It is another sin to per-

form it: and yet it looks extremely like a sin, not to perform it. Still he certainly ought not: but it is a great chance, whether the fear, or the shame, of that imaginary sin, may not drive him into the real one. Such probably was the case of Jephtha: such undoubtedly was that of Herod; who had never been guilty of murdering John the Baptist, if he had not first been guilty of swearing inconsiderately. For the Evangelists expressly tell us, *The King was exceeding sorry: yet for his oath's sake, and for their sakes who sat at meat with him, he sent and beheaded John in the prison**. Indeed it is a common excuse, that men make for acting, as they are sensible they ought not, and would not else, that they have sworn to do it, and therefore must and will.

But suppose the danger were only that of swearing to do things not unlawful in their nature, but inconvenient and prejudicial to us; it would surely be a sufficient reason against needless oaths. For in that case, unless we be released from our engagement, which we cannot always be, the Scripture very justly directs: *If a man vow a vow unto the Lord, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond: he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth*†. Is it not then a very wise caution which Solomon gives? *Be not rash with thy mouth: and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God*‡. For many a time have men lamented, through their whole lives, the unhappy consequences of one single oath.

It is very true, we may entangle ourselves by unlawful or imprudent promises, though we do not add this confirmation to them. But yet oaths are understood

* Matt. xiv. 9, 10. Mark vi. 26, 27. † Numb. xxx. 2. ‡ Eccl. v. 2.

to be, and therefore are, a much more solemn and strong and irrevocable tie, than mere promises; and consequently make the case just so much the worse. Besides, the same guard upon themselves, that restrains men from swearing rashly, will restrain them also from promising rashly: whereas he, that is ready to pour out oaths on every occasion, is in perpetual danger of binding himself down at once, by the strongest obligation under which he can be laid.

On the whole therefore, the son of Sirach's advice is extremely important. *Hear, O ye children, the discipline of the mouth: He that keepeth it, shall never be taken in his lips. Accustom not thy mouth to swearing: neither use thyself to the naming of the Holy One. For as the servant, that is continually beaten, shall not be without a blue mark; so he, that sweareth and nameth God continually, shall not be faultless. A man, that useth much swearing shall be filled with iniquity, and the plague shall never depart from his house. If he shall offend, his sin shall be upon him: and if he acknowledge not his sin he maketh a double offence. There is a word that is clothed about with death: God grant that it be not found in the heritage of Jacob: for all such things shall be far from the godly*.*

But, besides the sins and dangers which I have hitherto pointed out, consider the matter in another light, and you will see many more, of great moment, attending this practice. The spirit of religion is a spirit of mildness and benevolence. Even the irreligious, if they profess any regard to principle, profess a high esteem for these virtues. And there are few things less consistent with them, than the common use of oaths and imprecations. Cursing is the expres-

* Ecclus xxiii. 7—12.

sion of a heart, not satisfied with the mischief, that we can and dare inflict ourselves, but that seeks to interest even the great God, in making the person, with whom we are displeased, completely miserable. Recollect but a little, the dreadful words, that are uttered; consider a while, what things they are, which they who indulge themselves this way, beg of Heaven may fall on one another's heads; is it possible for the very fiends to go beyond the rage and malignity of such language? And let it not be pleaded, that they mean nothing of what they say. They mean often but too much of it, at least for the time; mean almost always to shew a very sinful wrath and bitterness: and the way, which they take to shew it, inflames it still more. For hardly any thing upon earth blows up anger to so outrageous a vehemence, as venting it in oaths and curses. They rouse up the passion of those, who use them: they provoke passion in return from those to whom they are used: and when once the flame thus kindled, blazes out on both sides, can there be in nature a more hellish spectacle seen or imagined? But suppose the swearer to be of a calmer disposition; continually throwing out phrases, of such terrible import, upon all who are about him, cannot fail to lessen whatever humanity he hath, and harden his heart towards them gradually. The least they imply is an immoral disregard of what becomes of them. And we shall never preserve that equitable attention to others and their remonstrances, which we certainly ought, if once we get a habit of driving away with a hasty curse, whoever at any time importunes us with his applications. Common swearers may be, to some persons, and on some occasions, very good natured men: but on others, they find a threatening oath or two is so very short

and easy a way, to get rid of a difficulty, right or wrong, that they often venture on most barbarous behaviour, under this protection: and sometimes, it may be feared, affect such language, merely to screen them from doing their duties, and in particular from paying their debts; or to deceive those, with whom they converse; or terrify those whom they cannot deceive.

But besides that oaths and curses are commonly used to support other injuries, they are injuries and outrages themselves. To our superiors they are affronts and indignities: to our equals they are rudeness: and it is a mean-spirited insolence to shew our contempt of those beneath us, by them, for no other reason, than because we know they must bear it. But indeed words of this nature are justly offensive, not only to the persons, against whom you direct them, but to all within hearing. For how have they deserved, to be made witnesses, whether they will or not, of all the brutalities you are pleased to utter? Even before those who have no religion, such transports must be extremely unbecoming, But remember too, there are some who have religion; whose ears it grates, and whose heart it grieves, as well it may, to hear the commandments of their God transgressed, and his holy name profaned wantonly. Why are not these to have due regard paid them? Why should it not be thought, in a nation professing Christianity, a point of common decency, in all men, to abstain from open violations of Christian precepts? And really, to behave without common decency, above all to the religion of a country, is of itself no small immorality. The other civilities of life are generally kept up, in outward form at least; and often to a great degree of delicacy. Whatever would be

unpleasing to any one, be the dislike of it ever so fanciful, is carefully avoided: and it is of considerable importance to our happiness, to act so. What ground is there then, to make an exception in this one case? And why must you treat *the King of all the earth**, before those who honour him, with that disrespect, which you would not express towards any common person, for whom any of the company present had the least regard? Such behaviour would produce dangerous resentments, on almost every other occasion, from most men. And though real Christians will in no way revenge your treatment of them, but join pity for you with their uneasiness at your discourse; this surely is no reason, why you should give them that uneasiness; and much less, why you should purposely single them out to feel it, as I fear is sometimes done. But indeed such conversation must be offensive to all in general, who have any consideration, either of good sense or agreeableness. It is irrational, it is absurd, it excites images that are shocking, it makes men appear like devils, to bring death, and hell, and eternal damnation, into every sentence, let the subject of discourse be what it will. As for the excuse, that these phrases are so familiar, that they make no impression, raise no ideas; there was a time at least, nor could it be a short one, when they did: and in proportion, as the meaning of such words is thus effaced and lost, I doubt all concern about the things, that once were meant, is effaced and lost too; and solicitude to obtain everlasting happiness, or escape everlasting misery, worn out of men's hearts. Yet still, God be thanked, there are some remaining, to whom profane language carries its original terror: and, for their sakes, if for no other

* Psal. xlvii. 7.

reason, it ought to be avoided. But far from that, they themselves, who alledge this plea of its being insignificant, seldom fail to confute it, by inventing new oaths and curses, as fast as ever they can, to alarm and awe those that hear them, for fear the old ones should have lost the power of doing it. And thus their language becomes every day more and more diabolical; till such kind of expressions make up perhaps near half of what some of them say. Now were each of these offences, taken singly, much lighter than it is; yet how enormous a weight of sin must the incessant repetition of them amount to, in the course of a man's life; and how heavy may it press on his conscience, when he comes to die! Then besides, it is a crime of public scandal, and bad example: you may lead great numbers of others into it, or encourage them in it; your acquaintance, your friends, your servants, your children; may contribute largely to their ruin, and share deeply in their guilt. Nay, you may contribute much more than you think of, to the increase of other wickednesses too; and, by consequence, towards bringing down the judgments of God upon your country. For, let some think as slightly as they will of taking his name in vain, it is a notorious fact, that all manner of crimes grow common and barefaced along with it: and therefore in proportion as that increases amongst any people, they gradually ripen for destruction. Accordingly we find the Prophet Jeremiah declaring expressly, that *because of swearing the land mourneth**. And Hosea puts down that, in the first place, as the leading sin of those many, for which the *Lord had a controversy with the Children of Israel. By swearing, and lying, and stealing, and committing adultery they break out, and blood*

* Jer. xxiii. 10.

*toucheth blood. Therefore shall the land mourn; and every one, that dwelleth therein, shall languish**. May God in his mercy give us grace to *turn ourselves from all our transgressions, that so iniquity may not be our ruin*†.

* Hos. iv. 1, 2, 3. † Ezek. xviii. 30.

SERMON XXXII.

EXOD. xx. 7.

THOU SHALT NOT TAKE THE NAME OF THE LORD THY GOD IN VAIN: FOR THE LORD WILL NOT HOLD HIM GUILTLESS, THAT TAKETH HIS NAME IN VAIN.

IN discoursing on these words, after laying before you the nature and guilt of perjury, I proceeded to treat of rash and needless oaths and imprecations: concerning which I have shewn,

I. That the mere prohibition of Scripture is alone sufficient obligation to abstain from them: and yet

II. That the wisdom and goodness of God in forbidding them is evident; as they are plainly inconsistent with a sense of piety and reverence towards him, with the support of truth and justice in the world, with a behaviour of humanity and common decency.

These things being proved, there may seem to be little need of saying any thing further concerning this sin. But as too many are apt to think, either that Christian preachers are led by prejudice to dress it up in false terrors, or that whatever objections there may be against it, there are likewise considerable pleas to be made in its favour; or, at least, that in certain circumstances men cannot abstain from it: I beg your attention once more to the subject, whilst I prove,

III. That others, as well as Christians, have condemned common swearing.

IV. That the pleas, alledged for it, are of no weight.

V. That, by observing a few plain directions, men may both avoid it, and even cure themselves and others of it.

III. In speaking to the third head, I might properly remind you of what I mentioned in the first discourse on this subject, that the old Jewish teachers condemned oaths, almost as strongly as our Saviour himself: nay, that Solomon hath set down the character of *him that sweareth* as a bad one; and of *him that feareth an oath*, as a good one.* But some may possibly except against authorities from these writers; as being of a religion too near akin to our own. Therefore none shall be quoted but Heathens. And though their very poets† and orators,‡ as well as lawgivers and philosophers, have delivered rules agreeable to those of Scripture, on this point: I shall produce only some of the latter. Rhadamanthus, the Cretan legislator, forbad all swearing directly by the name of God, to preserve it from profanation.§ To reverence an oath, is a well known precept of the famous Pythagoras.‖ And the philosopher Hierocles, in his commentary upon it, hath the following words. *This precept requires men, not only to speak truth when they swear, but to abstain from swearing: not to use oaths frequently, and rashly, and about trifles, to fill up a sentence, or confirm a common story.*

* Eccl. ix. 2. † Chærilus and Menander in Grot. on Matth. v. 34. ‡ Isoc. ad Demonic. § See note * on Serm. XXIX. on Oaths, p. 431. ‖ Aur. Carm 2. Diog. Laert. also gives this amongst his doctrines. Diod. Sic. Excerpt, l. 6. p. 555. saith, that Pythagoras παρηγγειλε τοις μανθανουσι σπανιως μεν ομνυναι, χρησαμενοις δε τοις ορκοις παντως εμμενειν.

For so shall we observe truth in our oaths, if we be sparing of them: But from frequent swearing to false swearing, is an easy fall. Plato directs that men do not on slight occasions name God; and scarce on any swear by him.* *Avoid oaths,* saith Epictetus,† *if it be possible, intirely: but if not, to the utmost of your power. An oath,* saith his commentator Simplicius, *is calling God to witness, and making him a voucher to what we say. Now to introduce God on little and insignificant occasions, expresses a contempt of him.* The earliest of these men were certainly under none of the prepossessions, which it may be fancied we are: and though such of them, as lived after Christ, are much the most explicit and the strongest in condemning all needless oaths, and therefore may be supposed to have learnt their dislike of them from believers in him; yet this only shews, that though they opposed Christianity in general, they were forced to confess the excellency of its doctrine in this particular, and to adopt it. For they say most exactly the same things, that we do: nor can any one writer, of any nation upon earth, be produced, that ever said the contrary. All the authority therefore, as well as all the reason in the world, bears testimony to the fitness and importance of God's command in this matter: and what pleas can there be on the other side, to excuse our disobedience? Let us proceed

IV. To consider them.

Some perhaps may imagine, that oaths procure credit to what they say. But are any more credited, than those, who never swear in their discourse at all? or any less, than those, who swear every moment? This is the way to lower and destroy, not raise, your credit. For it seems to imply a voluntary acknow-

* De Legibus, L. xi. † Ench. c. 33.

ledgement, on your own part, that your mere affirmation is unworthy of regard. You know best indeed, whether it deserves belief or not. But if it doth, you are very unwise to add more. It is considered, as no small privilege, allowed to the rank of some persons, that their assertion is admitted without an oath, in legal proceedings on matters of great moment. Why should not you partake of that privilege, as far as you can? Why will you degrade yourself needlessly? If your bare word be in truth a sufficient security; keep up the honour of it; and reserve additional confirmations for occasions of high importance, for such as seldom happen, and where an oath is indispensible. By making them common in every case, you lose the advantage of them in extraordinary cases. It is the character which men preserve, not merely the form of words which they use, that must give weight to what they say. And if your character be sunk; till you raise it again by a right behaviour, all other ways to gain credit will have very little effect. You may join if you will the sin of swearing with that of lying: but no one will suspect you the less of the latter, for hearing you guilty of the former. You may try to cloke falsehood with perjury: but you will soon be detected, and doubly abhorred; whereas if you will learn to speak truth, you will never need oaths. But indeed they who make this plea very often swear and curse, just as freely, in cases, where they cannot make it; in saying what no one doubts; in matters not of fact, but of speculative opinion; or matters depending, not on their testimony, but that of others; nay, sometimes, in the very asking of a question.

Instead of this excuse therefore a different one is invented; that where this kind of language is not

wanted to gain belief, at least it commands respect. But is any one, in reality, ever the better thought of for it; or the worse for want of it? Did you ever hear it said, or intimated, that such a one was a man of no understanding, or no honour, or no consequence, because he was never known to swear; or was a person of singular worth and importance, because he had a greater plenty and variety of oaths, than other men? What sort of respect must it be then, that such phrases can procure you? Perhaps you hope to appear terrible by the use of them. But where is the need of appearing so? It should rather be the care of reasonable creatures, to appear mild, and humane, and agreeable to each other. It is true, men in some stations must carry awe with them: but this is not the way to it. Swearing frights none, but those whom it is unmanly to fright: and the affectation of giving much terror, is a well-known mark, and commonly, though not always, a true one, of little courage. All the threatening imprecations in the world can only shew, that he who uses them, is an angry man, or would seem so: but as his anger is not in the least of more consequence, with them, than without them; so it may be shewn full as effectually without them, as with them. Nay, very often, such as would submit upon a moderate and decent reproof, are exasperated by the outrage of being sworn at; and it may be, provoked to return the language they receive: in which case, all that superiors get by it, is, teaching their inferiors to curse them to their faces; and throwing down the distinction they meant to keep up. Some indeed are so used to pour out oaths on all considerable occasions, that they are little minded if they do not: but then they are commonly so used to it, upon inconsiderable ones also, that they are not much

more minded, if they do. Or however that be, as this pretended necessity of swearing arises wholly from a habit of swearing without necessity; your having been guilty already can never justify your becoming more so. But your plain way is, leave off these wrong methods of making yourself attended to, and apply diligently to the right ones: and after a while, one calm word of command or direction will go a great deal farther, than ever so much bluster and blasphemy did before. At first indeed you may be under difficulties; but as your preceding transgressions of your duty have brought them upon you, you must bear them with patience. Or supposing, that not you, but others before you, have so accustomed those, with whom you are concerned, to this language, that they will not easily be kept in order without it; still, which of the two is fitter; that you should deliberately go on to violate the laws of God, and set all around you an example of it, merely to procure yourself more speedy regard from the profligate; or that you should keep yourself innocent, and reform them; the effect of which will be, double honour from them for the future? But after all, the real truth is, that this plea of commanding respect, as well as the former of gaining belief, is, generally speaking, mere pretence: and they who alledge them, swear just as much, when they know they shall get neither.

But there is a third inducement to it, which though not often mentioned perhaps, appears to have, with many, great weight; an opinion of its recommending them to the world, as being above precise restraints, of a lively conversation, and graceful behaviour. Now it must be acknowledged, that a free use of oaths will help to acquit them from the imputation of having any religion. Not that men are by any means always so

fearless of their Maker, as they give themselves airs of being. And it is surely the lowest of affectations, to make false pretences to a character, which, if it really belonged to them, could only dishonour them. For why they should, any of them, meet with more regard from men, for having no regard to God and no restraints on their behaviour, but what they may boldly throw off, when it serves a present turn; this is beyond all comprehension. Observe too, that as it is wicked, for believers in religion to swear needlessly; so it is absurd, for unbelievers to swear at all; and very dishonest also, to offer an oath for the confirmation of what they say, when they themselves must look upon it to be no confirmation in the least. As for the notion that oaths give a life and spirit to discourse; it must be confessed, that the whole spirit of some mens conversation consists in the profaneness of it: and to refuse them full scope in the only thing they have to be admired for, may seem ill-natured. But then it is so very easy to procure all the admiration, that swearing can give; an attainment, which the meanest and stupidest of human creatures possess often in a supreme degree; that one would think it should not be mightily coveted. If this be all you have to make a figure with, you will make a very poor one. And if you have any thing better to value yourself upon, trust to that: and leave such as have no other, to shine with so cheap an accomplishment; which indeed, of all the follies that ever made any man's conversation despicable and disagreeable, is the very greatest. And to see it in this light; suppose a dialogue were written down, as full of these ornaments, as some peoples discourse is, and you were to read it over; what should you think of it? Not only the practice in general would appear monstrously void of all decency and

propriety, but the very forms and terms made use of errant gross nonsense. Still, some common swearers may, in other respects, be men of good understanding and good breeding; but their faults must not be taken for excellencies; much less will they look becoming, when copied: and surely their oaths are disgusting, for still further reasons. The assuming air and vehemence, that is inseparable from them, expresses much incivility and disrespect. You never bear them from your inferiors on that very account. And yet, if it be such graceful language, why should not your children and servants accost you with it, on all occasions? But plainly, as long as the phrases of this kind have any meaning, they have a shocking one: and when they have none they are mere impertinence; which was never in any other case, accounted a beauty. Suppose you were to use in your discourse as many harmless expletives, as you do of these profane ones: would not you be ridiculous, even to a proverb? And yet there are not only no words, but no insignificant or inarticulate sounds and noises, but might, with just as much sense and elegance, be brought into every part of your conversation, as the oaths you are so fond of. And surely adding impiety to absurdity, cannot make it less absurdity. One would hope, their being forbidden is not the reason why you delight in them. If it be; think only, what a deliberate disobedience to God, and defiance of his authority, that implies. And if it be not, what motive can you have, to let such ugly excrescences deform your talk?

But some alledge, in the fourth place, that whether becoming or not, it is the fashion however, and that must be followed. But though much too common, it is by no means universal. There are, God be thank-

ed, great numbers innocent of it, yet well esteemed in the world, and the more for their innocence, by all whose esteem is worth having; and so may you. But were the exceptions fewer; must you needs prefer the customs of the world before all common sense, before the dictates of your conscience, before the commands of your Maker? Think a little of the matter. And remember too, the world hath many other bad customs. Is it your intention then, to comply with them all, and be completely profligate? If not, why do you comply with this? Other sins you may be inticed and persuaded into; but no one, I presume, will take much pains in pressing you to curse and swear. And if the practice be looked on by some with too much indulgence, it is looked upon by none with esteem. Such language may perhaps, in former days, long ago, have been one distinction of the upper part of the world: and truly one, that did them little credit, even then: but now, the very lowest of mankind are grown to be so thoroughly their match at it; and the most vulgar mouths have this whole set of phrases in such continual use; that it is high time for well bred men to have done with them. But above all, the most distant advances, towards any sort of profaneness in discourse, should be scrupulously avoided by that sex, which cannot yet plead any established custom for it; and whose esteem from the other depends so very greatly on the gentleness and delicacy of their conversation, that they will be far from finding their account, (whatever they may fancy) in exchanging it for a confident behaviour, and offensive expressions of masculine boldness.

But fifthly; some have yet a different plea to make. It is not the practice of the world that they insist on;

but swearing is unhappily become their own practice: and long habit hath made it quite familiar to them, and a thing of course. What you urge therefore, in alleviation of your crime, is, that you have been for very many years very constantly guilty of it. And is not this, on the contrary, one of the greatest aggravations, that can be? Suppose you had lived, as perhaps you have, in the habitual commission of several other sins besides; is that a reason, why you should go on with them all, and be easy about them; or a strong reason, why you should be deeply concerned for them, and set in earnest to amend without delay? But you can alledge, it may be, that you learnt it before you knew the harm of it; and indeed were taught it by the example of those, who should have taught you better things. Why, undoubtedly their setting you such a pattern was some excuse for you at first: but your following it to this day, and setting others the same, is void of all excuse. And what do you mean to do in the case? You will not say, that you never design to reform; but will indulge yourself, to your dying hour, in what God hath forbidden you. And if not, do you expect, that, what custom hath made hard to leave off, longer custom will make easy? When shall you do it, if not now? But, very probably, you have one thing farther to plead on this head: that you scarce know when you swear. And supposing this true, what doth it prove but how great and old a sinner, in this way, you have been? Men may accustom themselves to many faults, and those very gross ones, till, at last they commit them without reflecting upon it almost at all. But do you think, they may safely commit them for that reason; or, that they ought to mind better what they do? And observe, a habit of swearing is the less excusable on this account: be-

cause there is nothing in our frame, that originally tempts us to it. Other sins are deeply rooted in the constitution of man; have much pleasure and profit, at least great appearances of it, frequently attending them: profane language hath neither. Still, we are not to indulge even the vices, that are born with us: but much less one, to which nature doth not prompt us; and which therefore we may, if we will, very easily, both avoid at first, and lay aside afterwards. A little attention is almost the whole we need for the cure: and surely our Maker hath a right to this from us. The greatest swearer that ever was, can abstain from oaths in the presence of those, before whom he thinks them improper; and can expect, that his inferiors should abstain from them in his presence, be they ever so much addicted to them. Why then is not the presence of God to be equally reverenced? And what impossibility is there, of paying as great a regard to him, as we do to one another? The force of habit therefore, though a powerful motive to beware of falling into this sin, is no argument at all for continuing in it.

There is yet remaining a sixth, and the last plea I shall mention, made by some for themselves, that they do not swear commonly; scarce ever indeed, but when they are provoked, and passion gets the better of them. Now this, it must be owned, is a strong temptation, and therefore they hope no small excuse. But consider: it is only custom which hath made it a temptation: a person, who had not learnt to swear at such times, would never think of it. Besides, is every one to be excused for doing every thing that his passions tempt him to? We have many other passions, as well as anger, that tempt us to do ill. If one makes a sin excusable, why not another? And

where shall we stop? But even as to this passion; suppose a murderer should plead, that he never killed a man in cold blood, but only when he was angry; would this avail him? When men are moved by resentment, are they to give it full scope? are they to vent it in every way they please? especially in such ways, as must increase it? For were you desirous to excite rage within yourself to the very utmost, what could you do more effectual, than blow up the flame by vehement oaths and imprecations? You find therefore, that St. James, writing to persons, who suffered under very provoking ill usage, gives them particularly this caution: *But above all things, my brethren, swear not.** Undoubtedly, being surprized by sudden warmth, and hurried at once into a sin, is some mitigation of it. But you cannot say you are surprized into what you are constantly ready to practise, as often as any incitement to it comes in your way. Instead therefore of seeking excuses for doing wrong in this matter; seek, what are the best means to enable you to do right. And for your assistance in it, I now proceed to the

V. Head proposed: which was to give some plain directions for the prevention or cure of this great fault.

And in the first place, to avoid swearing in anger, avoid being in anger: keep your temper even and composed, by all the considerations, that reason and religion can suggest. Or, if you cannot help being ruffled, and feel that improper expressions are struggling for utterance, oblige yourself to silence; utter nothing at all, turn aside, and quit the company for a while, if there be need: for thus, in all likelihood, you will escape more sins and dangers, than one.

* James v. 12.

But, to secure you farther at all times: Recollect frequently what you have heard and read and been convinced of, concerning this practice; the impiety, the mischievousness, the indecency, the contemptibleness of it; with the utter vanity of the excuses alledged for it. But above all, possess your heart with a serious regard to God: think of him often and reverently; and you will soon cease to mention him irreverently. Have it ready upon your mind; he, that hath said, *Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain,* hath said also, *The Lord will not hold him guiltless, that taketh his name in vain:* he that hath said, *Swear not at all,** hath said also, *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.*† Further yet: abstain, as much as possible, from all company, that will set you the example of profane language: and be assured, that keeping yourself innocent in this respect will by no means be the only benefit you will receive from that caution. But if you must converse with such, be doubly on your guard before them? and if they attempt to ridicule your strictness, give your reasons, where there is hope of doing good: where there is none, endeavour to turn the discourse, and hear as little upon the subject, as you can; but what you must hear, bear it mildly, and resolutely. One should think, it might suffice men to dishonour God themselves, without driving others, by scoffs and railleries, to do it against their will. But if such treatment doth befall you, remember always, what your Lord and Master hath declared: *Whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy*

* Matth. v. 34. † Matth. xix. 17.

*angels.** *But whosoever shall confess me before men, him will I confess also before my Father, which is in Heaven.*† At the same time, endeavour to shelter yourself under the protection, and good counsel, of some prudent and serious friend. Surely you are not so unhappy, as to have none. If you are, it is high time you made one. Let him encourage, and watch over, your innocence; let him remonstrate to you, if you become guilty. And in that case, acknowledge your sense of the fault before any fit persons, that hear you commit it; authorize them to remind you of it: these things will tie you down to avoid it. Or, if more be needful, lay a penalty upon yourself for each offence: do some act of mortification, or of charity, to fix the sense of your transgression deeper in your mind. And make it a rule, to abstain, not only from the more shocking sort of oaths and imprecations, but from palliating them under silly disguises; or using others in their stead, that are gentler: for besides that they will lead you to worse, they are bad in themselves. Our Saviour you know expressly forbids swearing *by Heaven, by the earth,* by any of the pretended harmless forms: and gives a reason for it, which a Heathen writer who lived after him, gives too; that though none of them named God, they all of them referred to him.‡ They can have no other sense: and he will understand them in this. Indeed expressions, which taken strictly may not be oaths, yet, if they bear the resemblance of oaths, ought to be shunned, as *appearances of evil:*§ for whoever goes as near, as he can, towards sin; will seldom fail of making one step farther, and falling into it. Nay, any careless, and especially ludicrous

* Mark viii. 38. † Matth. x. 32.

‡ Ulpian saith, that they who use such forms, *respectu divini numinis jurant.* § 1 Thess. v. 22.

mention of God in discourse, be it ever so remote from swearing, is undeniably *taking his name in vain:* and irreverent conversation about any part of religion, or any thing connected with it, always brings on some degree of disregard to its ever blessed Author and object.

When once, by these or better directions, you have reformed yourself; you may hope for success in the farther duty of preserving others innocent: which till then you will attempt with an exceeding ill grace. And surely it must be a mortifying situation, that men dare not blame their very children for swearing, because the reproof would fly back into their own faces. It is reported indeed, that there are parents, who can rejoice in their children's giving this early proof of manliness. And truly they had need rejoice while they can. For such an education will soon bring forth other fruits, besides this, that will turn their mirth into heaviness enough. And then they will exclaim, and pretend to wonder, that the poor wretches come out to be, what they have made them. Such, as would be happy, in their children, must lay a foundation for it early. And if to conduct them right, it be necessary to reform the rest of your family, and yourselves too, it is only a double reason for doing so, instead of an objection against it.

But indeed most, if not all men, may go, at least occasionally, much farther; and check profane language in other places, besides their own homes. A mere look of surprize, disapprobation, or sorrow, on hearing it, will often have a great effect. And without the least violation of good manners, but treating those with much regard, who are pleased to treat God with none, various methods may be found of sometimes plainly declaring, sometimes obliquely intimat-

ing, the manifold wrongness of such expressions. There is indeed one thing, that would seem to be of this kind, and hath a contrary effect: I mean, when swearers are chid absolutely in jest; in a way, that makes it visible, they are not in the least worse thought of; and they perhaps carry on the jest, by begging pardon of the company, and doing the same thing again the next minute; without having it once brought to their thoughts, that they have cause either to beg pardon of God, or be ashamed of themselves. Such a farce of reproof encourages, instead of discountenancing the sin. But a real and serious dislike, shewn with discretion, and requisite mildness, may do incredible service, to young offenders above all. And therefore, whoever wishes well to his acquaintance and friends, to religion and virtue; especially, whoever hath any peculiar ground to hope he may have weight; should conscientiously make use of every opportunity for promoting right behaviour, in this and all respects: knowing, that he, *who converteth a sinner from the error of his way, shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.**

* James v. 20.

SERMON XXXIII.

GAL. v. 24.

AND THEY, THAT ARE CHRIST'S, HAVE CRUCIFIED THE FLESH, WITH THE AFFECTIONS AND LUSTS.

THIS expression, *crucifying the flesh*, may probably seem to most, when they first hear it, or attend to it, a very strange one: as, no doubt, numbers of others in Scripture do. But a little consideration will shew, that there is no cause to censure them, or be offended at them. For amidst the multiplicity of languages, that are in the world, and the various notions, tempers, and circumstances, of the people who are bred up to use them; it is unavoidable, but there will be in each many ways of speaking, which though easy and familiar by custom to one part of mankind, must yet, to the rest, appear harsh and unaccountable. This is the case even of neighbouring countries in our own times: much more then must it be expected in those tongues, of which the vulgar use hath long since failed, and which formerly expressed the sentiments of distant nations, inspired both by the age and the climate they lived in, with a different turn of thought and stile. Hence proceeds the surprizing warmth, and boldness of figure, the abrupt transitions, the sudden lofty flights of the Eastern writers and speakers, utterly contrary to the cool and regular genius of the European languages. And amongst the former, the compositions of the Jews must of

course have a peculiar tincture and propriety of their own: not only because they were prohibited, for good reasons, all needless commerce with other lands; but chiefly because divine revelation delivered to them such doctrines and precepts, and consequently such terms, as the heathen had not; which must likewise greatly increase in number by frequent references to their own articles of faith, observances, and sacred books. When Christianity was published to the world, here was again a new set of discoveries and ideas, added to the preceding: which being first communicated in Hebrew, were thence transfused into Greek, by the Apostles addressing themselves to the Gentiles. Thus was the stile of the New Testament produced: which being as literally translated, and closely imitated, as it well could, (for the nature of the thing required strictness) the same forms of speech have been derived down into the modern tongues of Christian countries. And so it hath come to pass by a kind of necessity, that, in discourses on religion, words, meanings, constructions, images, occur, extremely remote from the common idiom of the language on other occasions. And these, weak persons are apt to mistake, artful disputants to pervert, and unlearned or unfair affecters of wit and free thought to ridicule; though originally they were of plain signification, and are still, when understood, full of good sense and beauty.

Thus, *crucifying*, or as the Apostle elsewhere puts it, *mortifying** the flesh, is a phrase far out of the road of our daily conversation, and of our reading on subjects of business and entertainment: from whence it easily happens, that the superstitious misapprehend, and the profane despise it; though indeed it denotes

* Col. iii. 5.

a reasonable, a necessary duty, and describes that duty, not only in a strong, but elegant manner. To shew these things clearly, I shall

I. Explain to you the rise and general intention of this way of speaking.

II. Specify more distinctly the nature of the duty designed to be taught by it.

III. Shew you how strictly our belonging to Christ obliges us to practise that doctrine.

I. I shall explain to you the rise and general intention of this way of speaking in Scripture.

Now the words, *Flesh* and *Spirit*, though employed by the writers of the New Testament in different senses, according to the subject of which they treat, are yet commonly expressions of the moral state and character of man; the dispositions of his heart towards piety or sin. *Spirit* is the principle of reason and religion: *Flesh* of appetite and passion. Every one feels in himself both right and wrong inclinations. The former our conscience approves. And therefore pursuing them would on that account alone be properly called, *walking* after *the Spirit*,* that *inward man, which* naturally *delighteth in the law of God*.† But a much stronger ground for it is, that the divine Spirit hath not only revealed to us the whole rule of life, and the most powerful motives to observe it, but is continually present to our minds, exciting and strengthening us, if we permit him, to every good work. On the other hand, *all flesh having corrupted his way before God*,‡ sinners may be justly said to *walk* after *the flesh*, because they live conformably to the wicked customs of the world. But the true foundation of the phrase is, that this *cor-*

* Rom. viii. 4. † Rom. vii. 22.
‡ Gen. vi. 11, 12.

*ruptible body** subjects the fallen children of Adam perpetually by its irregular propensities, to a variety of temptations, hard to be overcome. And therefore even Heathen authors have represented it, as the principal source of moral evil: no wonder then, that those of Scripture do, on fuller knowledge of the case.

But in St. Paul more especially the *flesh* means our vicious tendencies; not only those to sensual indulgence, but the whole system of them. Thus ver. 13 of this chapter: *Brethren, ye have been called unto liberty; only use not your liberty for an occasion to the flesh:* that is, to any blameable purpose. But the particular blameable use, which he had in view, was that of uncharitable contention. For it follows immediately, *But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.* Again, ver. 19, having said, that *the works of the flesh are manifest,* he proceeds to reckon amongst them, not only *adultery and lasciviousness,* but *variance, envy, strife, sedition.* And the *fruits of the spirit,* opposed to these, ver. 22, *are* not only *temperance,* but *long-suffering, peace, goodness, faith,* or *fidelity, meekness.*

Farther: because there is a connexion and sympathy between the various dispositions of the same kind, whether moral or immoral, each adding vigour and strength to the other: the several vices, to which mankind is prone, are described in God's Word, as uniting into and forming a living body, hence denominated *the body of sin,* or of *the lusts of the flesh;*† of which every criminal inclination is a member. Thus, when the Apostle had enjoined Christians to *mortify their members, which are upon the earth,*‡

* Wisd. ix. 15. † Col. ii. 11. ‡ Col. iii. 5.

he instantly explains himself to mean the parts of this figurative body of sin, which he goes on to enumerate: *covetousness, anger, fornication, uncleanness, malice, blasphemy.*

And, in consequence of this, because not only the nature of all men is tainted originally, but the conduct of most men hath, in some respects at least, been habitually unjustifiable; therefore the sins, which they have indulged, considered in the manner above mentioned, as united into one organized body, are also stiled in Scripture, *the old man:* in opposition to that *new man,* or blessed change of temper and behaviour, which the Gospel was designed to produce. And however singular the former of these phrases may appear; the latter, which in itself is equally so, that of becoming a new man, is both frequent in our common speech, and warranted by the politest of classical authors.

This expression therefore having taken place, the amendments of our hearts and actions is sometimes denoted by laying aside or *putting off this old man.* Thus Eph. iv. 22. *That ye put off, concerning the former conversation, the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; and put on the new man, which is created according to God,* that is, according to the image of God, *in righteousness and true holiness.* And because our gracious Redeemer was a perfect example of these, putting on the new man is elsewhere called, *putting on the Lord Jesus Christ:** a mode of speech fully vindicated by the ancient usage of the Greek tongue, in which the New Testament was written. For in that, *putting on any person,* signified, forming one's self by his character, and imitating his manner.

* Rom. xiii. 14. Gal. iii. 27.

At other times, this intire change of affections, will, and demeanour, is expressed more strongly. We are said to *be dead to sin,* and *raised up again to walk in newness of life:** which means to be separated for ever from bad habits and customs, and enter into a different state, and course, of thinking and acting; in which *the former things are passed away, and all things are made new.*† The promises indeed, of this renovation on our part, and of grace to accomplish it, and future happiness to reward it, on God's part, are first made in baptism: which therefore the Scripture‡ calls our new birth to this new life. But then, it is only by continual care, (if Providence allows us time) to grow in grace, and become every day more completely dead to all transgression, and alive to all duty, that we shall arrive at the maturity, requisite for our acceptance.

Farther yet: when the Word of God intends to give us the most awakening sense, how intire our change must be, and with how unremitted a resolution we must arm ourselves against every bad inclination; then the expression chosen is, not that of dying to sin, but of *mortifying,* killing it. For the original signification of the words, translated, *mortify,* is not the now common one, of keeping under, and treating with some austerity, but of destroying, putting to death: as where the Apostle saith, *If through the spirit ye do mortify the deeds of the body,* unlawful indulgences, *ye shall live:*§ and in the passage already cited, *mortify therefore your members, which are upon the earth.* In pursuance of which mortal enmity between religion and wickedness, every serious

* Rom. vi. 2, 4. † Rev. xxi. 4, 5. ‡ John iii. 3—7.
§ Rom. viii. 13.

believer considers himself as a *soldier of Christ,** whose whole life is to be a warfare against those *lusts which war against the soul.*†

And lastly, because the great end of our Saviour's incarnation and death was to engage us in this good fight, and enable us to obtain the victory; therefore overcoming and sacrificing to him our unlawful desires, is, by an elegant allusion to the manner of his death, (which was painful and slow, like our extirpation of them) called *crucifying* them; not only here in the text, but in another parallel one; *Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.*‡ Whence also our Apostle saith farther, that *by the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ,* by the example of his sufferings, and the grace which they have procured, *the world is crucified unto him, and he unto the world.*§ He regards it no more, than the Jews did our Saviour, when they condemned him to the most ignominious torments, but hates it mortally, and despises it utterly, so far as it is sinful: and is content, that, in return, it should hate and despise him, rather than comply with its wicked customs.

This then is the true Christian mortification. And the figures, describing it, are indeed remarkably bold and full of energy: but they are accurate, instructive, animating; and alas, but too necessary, to convince unthinking and unwilling creatures, as we are, (prone to explain away into nothing every precept we can) of the zeal and severity, with which we are to extirpate all that is faulty within our souls. The commands of our blessed Lord himself carry in them the same

* 2 Tim. ii. 3, 4. † 1 Pet. ii. 11. ‡ Rom. vi. 6. § Gal. vi. 14.

force: *If our right hand offends us, to cut it off; if our right eye, to pluck it out:** if any desire we feel, will be a probable occasion of our falling, to suppress it, however dear; if any action we are engaged in, to quit it, however advantageous in other respects. And the reason he adds, admits of no reply. *It is better for thee to enter into life maimed, than having two hands or two eyes, to be cast into hell-fire:* it is better to undergo the most painful self-denial here, and be recompensed with heavenly felicity hereafter; than to enjoy the *pleasures of sin for a season,*† and suffer the vengeance of the Almighty for ever.

Having now explained the rise and general intention of the principal phrases of this sort in Scripture, I proceed

II. To specify more distinctly the nature of the duty designed to be taught by them.

And here you cannot fail to perceive at first sight, that harsh treatment of our bodily frame, only for the sake of treating it harshly, is no part of Christian mortification, or Christian duty. It is indeed a practice contrary to reason, and no less to Scripture. For St. Paul saith, *no man,* that is, no wise man, *ever hated his own flesh.*‡ Yet the opinion, that such things are in themselves acceptable to God, hath not only been common in false religions, but crept into the true: and both furnished unbelievers with an objection against it, and misled believers very unhappily. For they, who fancy, that exercising rigour on their persons hath any good in it, separate from the good uses to which it may contribute, are some of them led to fancy also, that the farther they carry it the better; till they hurt, perhaps ruin, their healths,

* Matth. v. 29, 30. xviii. 8, 9. Mark ix. 43, 45, 47.
† Heb. xi. 25. ‡ Eph. v. 29.

disorder their understandings, or however sour their tempers: while others conceive, that there is very great merit in a very little suffering; and consequently persuade themselves, that God will readily excuse the smaller faults of a behaviour not quite so moral as it should be, on their punctual performance of these higher duties, as they esteem them; though, in truth, not only imaginary, but often of little more than imaginary hardship. And thus, whereas, common sinners are open to remorse of conscience, which there is hope may, sooner or later, through the grace of God, amend them: these, on the contrary, proceed self-applauded, and fully persuaded of their title to a distinguished share of divine favour. On which account our Saviour tells the Pharisees, men of austerity in some respects, and wonderous exactness in little matters, that *the publicans and the harlots shall go into the kingdom of Heaven before them.**

Not that Christians, of more abstemious lives than ordinary, are therefore to be condemned as Pharisees and hypocrites; or derided, as weak and superstitious. Every one is bound to employ such means for his preservation from sin, and advancement in piety and virtue, as either God's Word hath prescribed, or his own reason and experience recommend. Now some may find rules to be useful or necessary, which to others would be neither. Some again may rashly censure what they would do much better to imitate. And all persons, but especially all who live in ease and plenty, should be attentive to *keep their bodies in subjection:*† not harassing them as enemies, but ruling and providing for them as servants, in such manner as to make them both willing to obey, and able to perform their work. They should watch over

* Matth. xxi. 31. † 1 Cor. ix. 27.

their natural fondness for pleasure, and tendency to follow the customs of the world; not with unreasonable scrupulousness, but with religious prudence: learn to suspect their favourite inclinations, and the opinions that countenance them: check themselves in proportion as they grow eager, stop and look round them with care: never adventure to the extremity of what is lawful, but in all dubious cases lean to the undoubtedly safer side: be moderate in the most allowable gratifications of this world, and delight principally in cultivating and improving those pious and virtuous affections, which alone can *make them meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light*:* of a happiness entirely spiritual, and abstracted from flesh and blood.

But then, while we observe this caution in regard to worldly objects, we must be careful also on the other hand, that we carry it not to dangerous or extravagant lengths; that we seem not unthankful to, or suspicious of him, *who hath given us richly all things to enjoy*;† that we disguise not religion by putting it in a melancholy and forbidding dress; that we be not betrayed by the restraints, under which we lay ourselves, either into vain self-opinion and spiritual pride, or a rigidness of temper, very unsuitable to the gentle spirit of the Christian profession: but particularly, that we forbear to condemn, or even despise, our brethren of more seeming latitude; who, it may be under the appearance of a freer life, (which was our Saviour's own case, for he *came eating and drinking*)‡ preserve really and inwardly a stricter guard over their thoughts, words, and actions than we do. And in general, all persons ought to take heed, that while they are watching against the approach of

* Col. i. 12. † 1 Tim. vi. 17. ‡ Matth xi. 19. Luke vii. 34.

one sort of sins, those of another do not find a ready admission. We are willing enough to keep at ever so great a distance from the faults, to which we have little or no inclination; and often affect to make our zeal in that respect remarkable: but then perhaps more favourite vices have easy entrance into our breasts, and take firm possession of them. We are shocked, for instance, and with much cause, at the monstrous and ruinous eagerness for pleasure, the profligate and unprecedented contempt of religion, that prevails in the world: our behaviour, on these heads, is unblameable, exemplary; and we value ourselves upon it beyond bounds. Yet possibly, all the while, we indulge ourselves to the full another way: are unjust and fraudulent, or selfish and unreasonable, or penurious and hard-hearted, or censorious and unforgiving, or peevish and ill-tempered; make every one about us uneasy, and those chiefly, whose happiness ought to be our first care. This is applauding ourselves for being fortified, where the enemy is not likely to make an attack: and leaving the places, that are most exposed, quite undefended. Every one therefore ought to study the weak parts of his own heart and conduct, and spend the main of his attention upon these: that so not only a wrong inclination or two may be rooted up, (which if left to themselves would scarce grow) or may be sacrificed in favour of others as bad; but the whole *body of sin* be destroyed; the *flesh*, the principle of evil, *with* all *its affections and lusts*, nailed to the cross of Christ.

And this duty of mortification is no more confined to one season, than to one sin. The practice of it either must be constant, or will be fruitless. The time of Lent indeed hath been more especially appropriated to it: not that we should think the shew, or

the reality, of a little more exactness than ordinary, for a few weeks, (productive perhaps only of ill humour) so meritorious; that when we have once got it over, we may live almost as we please, till the unwelcome days return, when we are to atone afresh for our past offences, and so make way for the commission of future ones. For, as the son of Sirach observes, *He, that washeth himself after the touching of a dead body, if he touch it again, what ava'leth his washing? So is it with a man, that fasteth for his sins, and goeth again and doth the same. Who will hear his prayer, or what doth his humbling profit him?* * Our great concern is to mortify all irregular desires with such incessant care, that there may be as little need, as little room, as possible, to distinguish one season from another in that respect. But because we are strangely apt to postpone a work, generally disagreeable in proportion as it is necessary; our Church hath wisely directed, that the negligent, (and we all are such in some measure) should now be more solemnly called to consider their ways, afflict their souls for their transgressions, and renew the intermitted discipline which is requisite to make their hearts better. This is our true business at present. Methods of keeping Lent, which end with it, and leave behind them no durable effect, cannot be of much use; and may be fatal, by deceiving us into a false security, and forgetfulness of what I proposed to shew you,

III. That our Christian profession strongly binds us to mortify continually every immoral appetite and passion. *They, that are Christ's, have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts.*

Instead of this, the Apostle might have said, (like

* Ecclus xxxiv. 25, 26.

the philosophers of his own and preceding times) they who are truly rational beings, who see the beauty of virtue and deformity of vice, who feel the pleasures and the pains of the moral sense, who form just notions of the real good and evil of man, who are ambitious of imitating their Creator and acquiring his favour in their present state of existence and perhaps a future one: but in saying, *they who are Christ's,* he hath said all this, and much more. Christianity comprehends every consideration of nature and reason in the fullest manner; and as they are all insufficient, some too speculative and unaffecting, some too disputable and uncertain; adds others of inestimable value, peculiar to itself. A heathen may want almost intirely, and must want in a great degree, both the means of learning what mankind is most deeply interested in, and motives and power to practise what he hath learned: a Christian, allowed to read and hear the word of God, cannot, without inexcusable negligence: and *of them to whom much is given, much will be required.** Through Christ, who hath enlightened us, we *know all things;*† *through Christ which strengtheneth us, we can do all things:*‡ through Christ, who died for us, what we do shall be rewarded, though deserving nothing, with eternal life. And thus hath *the grace of God, which bringeth salvation,* not only *taught* but enabled us, *denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, to live soberly, righteously and godly in this present world.*§ They, who are Christ's in *name* only, bind themselves to this: they, who are in reality his, perform it. *If any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his:*‖ and *the fruits of the Spirit,* we are told immediately before

* Luke xii. 48. † 1 John ii. 20. ‡ Phil. iv. 13.
§ Tit. ii. 11, 12. ‖ Rom. viii. 9.

the text, and through the whole Scripture, are the pious movements of a good heart, and the actions of a good life. Our blessed Lord *gave himself for us, that he might sanctify and cleanse us, and present us to himself holy and without blemish.* * If then we labour not to become such, we frustrate, so far as our own concern reaches, his gracious intentions, and make his sufferings vain. If we crucify not our affections and lusts, *we crucify him afresh, and put him to open shame;* † pour contempt on his glorious undertaking ourselves, and expose it to the scorn of others: the consequence of which will be, that, as *while we profess to know him, in works we deny him,* ‡ so will he in the day of judgment *profess to us, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.* § Still it should be observed, that so far both good and bad Christians are his, as to be always under his dominion. *None of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself,* exempted from his authority: *whether we live or die, we are the Lord's;* ‖ but the wicked continue under his government, just as upon earth, rebels continue subjects; not intitled to benefits from their prince, but liable justly to sorer punishments, than his other enemies. Think then, will you be Christ's at *his coming,* ¶ only to have *vengeance taken of you in flaming fire,* ** or to *enter with him into his glory?* †† If the latter be your choice, the only way to it is, that you think it not too much to crucify your flesh figuratively, renounce and destroy your forbidden desires, however painful it be, for him; since he thought it not too much to let his flesh

* Eph. v. 25, 26, 27. † Heb. vi. 6. ‡ Tit. i. 16.
§ Matth. vii. 23. ‖ Rom. xiv. 7, 8. ¶ 1 Cor. xv. 23.
** 2 Thess. i. 8. †† Luke xxiv. 26.

literally be crucified for you. And if you will make sure of doing this at all, you must do it immediately.

Perhaps you will say, we hope it is done already: for the text assures us, all believers have done it. But observe: at that time almost all professed believers were real ones; for they had no temptation to make a false profession: and in general, speculative believers were practical ones; else they would never have suffered what they did. But in our times, the case is much altered. And in all times, the true method of arguing is, not, *we are Christ's*, and therefore we *have crucified our affections and lusts:* but, *we have crucified our affections and lusts*, and therefore *we are Christ's*. Our faith must be proved from our works: not our works from our faith. By *their fruits ye shall know them*, is the rule; * and by those we must know our own state, as well as that of others. But supposing we have cause to believe it good, have we not greater cause to be sensible it is not perfect? And should we not be striving continually to make it more so? *They that are Christ's*, the Apostle tells us, *have crucified the flesh*. But he doth not tell us, they have done it so effectually and so completely, as they ought. On the contrary he tells us, that he himself had *not* yet *attained*, but was still *pressing on towards the mark*. † And surely we should be doing it without ceasing. Unless we are careful to advance, we shall be driven back; unless we pursue our enemy to destruction; though put to flight, he will return: though *wounded* as it were *to death, his deadly wound will be healed:* ‡ and gradually, if not suddenly, his empire may become more absolute, and our condition more deplorable, than ever. At least he will be perpetually annoying us, disturbing our peace, taking

* Matth. vii. 20. † Phil. iii. 12, 13, 14. ‡ Rev. xiii. 3.

away our comfort, darkening our prospects. Nor shall we be losers in this life only, by neglect of going on to perfection: but in the next also, the less complete the victory is, the smaller will be the reward: and they *who have sown sparingly, shall reap also sparingly.* * Let us therefore sow plentifully the seeds of every virtue; and extirpate with such diligence every *root of bitterness,* that there may be the freest room and the fullest nourishment for every grace of the Christian life to flourish, and be fruitful. *Of ourselves* indeed *we can do nothing.* † But this is far from being a just plea for stopping where we are: since *God is able to make all grace abound towards us; that we having always all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work.* ‡ Provided then we apply to him, by the means he hath appointed, and engaged to bless, humble faith, earnest prayer, strict vigilance, and constant use of his holy ordinances, we shall not fail to experience the truth of his promise: *They, that wait upon the Lord, shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings, as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint.* §

* 2 Cor. ix. 6. † John xv. 5. ‡ 2 Cor. ix. 8. § Is. xl. 31.

SERMON XXXIV.

HEB. xi 17.

BY FAITH, ABRAHAM, WHEN HE WAS TRIED, OFFERED UP ISAAC; AND HE, THAT HAD RECEIVED THE PROMISES, OFFERED UP HIS ONLY BEGOTTEN SON.

THE character of Abraham in general is represented throughout the Word of God, as highly respectable. But his obedience to the divine command, in devoting to death and sacrificing, so far as the act of the mind was concerned, his beloved son, the only heir of his family, and of all the gracious predictions made to him, is peculiarly celebrated for its transcendent piety; first in the Old Testament, by an angel from Heaven, speaking in the name of God; then in the New, by the Apostle St. James, as well as the writer of this epistle. But as they, who look at the sun too intently, dazzle their eyes, till all around them, and even the light itself, appears dark: so men have strained their thoughts, in comparing and measuring the weakness of their own faith and resolution against the strength of Abraham's, till they have been quite confounded with it. And hence some have imagined this direction to be such a one as could not possibly come from God: whilst others have thought it was a trial, rather of his discernment, than of his dutifulness; and that though he meant well, he might have reasoned better. The former opinion is

designed to contradict and discredit Scripture: nor is the latter, though intended to remove an objection against it, by any means consistent with it. For we should never have found there such lofty encomiums of his proceeding so far, through mistake, towards an action, which would have been extremely unnatural and barbarous, if the injunction to do it, had not altered the quality of it: but whatever kind acknowledgment had been made of his good purpose, there would certainly have been a reproof of his wrong judgment; at least an admonition, that it was wrong: whereas we find nothing but unmixed commendation of his behaviour. For the sake therefore, both of such as incline to either of these notions, and of many humbler and devouter minds; who yet feel, (as perhaps we have now and then most of us done) great reluctance in their affections against this article of sacred history, and some difficulties in point of reason also; I shall endeavour to shew distinctly,

I. The possibility of God's giving such an order.

II. The evidence, which Abraham had, and we may have now, of his actually giving it.

III. The improbability, that the obedience paid to it should have any bad effect in after times.

IV. The good ends, that might be and were promoted by it.

I. The possibility of God's giving such an order.

Indeed, were we but nearly so modest as we ought to be, we should be very backward to question, whether a Being of unsearchable wisdom can do what there is any competent proof he hath done: and should carry a strong sense of our own short-sightedness and incapacity along with us, to check all petulance of arguing on such points. But happily a moderate submission of our poor understandings to the

divine, will be sufficient on the occasion before us.

That *the God of the spirits of all flesh,** *in whose hand is the soul of every living thing, and the breath of all mankind,*† may *take away* at his pleasure what he hath *given* only during his pleasure,‡ cannot possibly be doubted. We experience, that in the daily course of his providence he takes away the most innocent, the most deserving, the most useful persons, very unexpectedly, and, to our thinking, very unseasonably; for causes not to be known till *the day of the revelation of his righteous judgment.*§ And, shocking as this may often seem, or afflicting as it may feel, it is yet no more than removing his subjects, (in whom he hath absolute property, and over whom he hath unlimited authority) from one part of his dominions to another, still to remain under the same gracious government, and only to serve in a different and better station.

Now what he so continually doth by various diseases, and what we call accidents, (many of them attended with long and dreadful sufferings) why might he not, if on any occasion he saw it proper, do by a shorter and easier method, by the hands of another human creature? Magistrates appoint their officers to execute those, whom they have condemned. Kings and generals appoint their armies to destroy multitudes, that are guiltless themselves, though possibly involved in the guilt of others. Killing would be murder in both these cases, if a lawful command did not alter the nature of them. But that supersedes and overrules the obligations to the contrary, which else would arise from the common relation of man to

* Numb. xvi. 22. † Job. xii. 10.
‡ Job i. 21. § Rom. ii. 5.

man. Surely then God might always give the same command, whenever he thought fit to interpose. And the person, who had his authority, was well authorized, and bound to act according to his commission. Else not only Abraham would have acted unjustifiably in this matter, but the Jews, in making war on the Canaanites, Jehu in extirpating the House of Ahab, many other persons in many other things, all which, the Scripture saith, were done in obedience to the voice of Heaven. And the consequences of making these concessions, (for we cannot stop at one) every serious believer will see with horror. But in truth we need make none of them. If God cannot empower a person to do any thing, but what would be lawful without his order, some of the lowest of us have a right to do more than he. And if he can empower in one such case, why not in all: in that of life and death, as well as the rest?

Since then his mere command given might oblige one man to take away the life of another: it might oblige a father to take away the life of his son. For the particular relation of kindred, can no more be pleaded as a ground of disobeying the divine will, than the universal relation of humanity. We own, God hath enjoined parents to love their children: but not better, than they love their Maker. He hath planted in their hearts instincts of warm affection towards them: but not to the prejudice of their duty towards himself. The law of nature, that of the land, may require a man to put his guilty son to death; to expose his innocent son, for the needful service of the public, to unavoidable destruction; nay, himself to fight against his son, if they are members of two societies at war with each other. And why might not God require whatever of the like sort he

judged to be requisite? The magistrate's only justification is, that he acts on the authority of God, as declared by the voice of nature: and why is it not a sufficient justification, that Abraham acted upon the same authority, as declared by the voice of revelation? One end of sacrifices probably was, to recognize, that all things are God's gift, by surrendering some choice parts of them to him in this form. Now Isaac had been the gift of God in a most peculiar sense: his parents had enjoyed the comfort of him for many years. And if he, who might have snatched him away before, whenever he would, by any of the common methods, was pleased to demand him back at last by as extraordinary a one, as that in which he bestowed him, what could be said against it?

I acknowledge, it may seem hard-heartedness to argue in so rigid a manner on so tender a subject: and am very sensible, that there is no possibility of considering Abraham's case as our own, nay of imagining it distinctly as his, without bleeding inwardly at the thought; and rejoicing from one's soul, that the days of such commands are long ago past. But still the right of issuing them forth was ever inherent in God, and must be confessed, and when it is needful, vindicated. To this very hour both religion and virtue call upon us frequently to controul and act against our most affectionate inward feelings, even towards them that are dearest to us; though not near to the same degree, that Abraham did. And it is a very ungrateful return, instead of thanking God, that he doth not carry our trial so far, to insist that he cannot.

He cannot indeed require what is absolutely and always unfit: but taking away life is fit or unfit, according to circumstances. He cannot require a pa-

rent to hate his child: and it is the height of infidel perverseness, to interpret our Saviour's words, of *hating father and mother and wife and children,** literally and strictly, when we have a plain direction to interpret them comparatively.† But he may require a parent, as we have daily proof, willingly to yield up and resign his child: and to offer him, is but one step further, however painful a one. He cannot give men a general commission to take away each others lives: for this would be inconsistent with the scheme of his providence, and destructive to mankind. But he may give a particular commission of that sort in some extraordinary juncture: for it may be to their advantage. He cannot order a single life to be taken away, or a single action of any kind to be done, without reason; for it would be contrary to the perfection of his nature. But he may have many reasons utterly beyond our reach. And to assert that he can have none, is to set up our own understandings for infinite, and deny his to be such. Whether we can perceive any reasons, and what, in the present case, will be inquired under the fourth head. It suffices for this first, that God might see reasons to give forth the command, which the Scripture saith he did. He saw indeed at the same time reasons against the execution of it: as Solomon did against the execution of his, though a very wise one, for the division of the child.‡ But Abraham could by no means penetrate so far: and therefore was bound to obey, if on due consideration he was sure he was ordered. Let us now then examine

II. What evidence he might have of this, and we may have even now.

The Almighty and All-wise cannot be without some way, probably many ways, of notifying his will, what-

* Luke xiv. 26. † Matth. x. 37. ‡ 1 Kings iii. 25.

ever it be, clearly to his creatures: for even we can notify ours clearly, one to another. If an equal of ours were to bid us do what Abraham was bidden; though we ought to refuse obedience, yet we should not doubt, or we need not long doubt, who it was, or what he said. And why could not Abraham be equally certain, when God spoke to him? That we know not, how God shewed it to be himself, is no argument in the least, that he did not shew it effectually. If it were, it would be an argument against all revelation, as well as this. Some indeed have objected, that Abraham could not have so full proof by any revelation, that God enjoined him to sacrifice his son, as he had by reason, that it was criminal. But, you have seen, he had no proof of its being criminal, if God enjoined it: but full proof of the contrary. And therefore the objection, rightly stated, is only, that he had not so much evidence of the injunction, as he had, that the action, unless it were enjoined, was unlawful. Now even this is more, than can ever be made out. But, supposing it: A judge hath seldom or never such absolute certainty of the guilt of a prisoner tried before him, as he hath, that unless he be guilty, he should not condemn him. Yet still, if the evidence of his guilt be sufficient, he condemns him very justly. And so, if the evidence of God's command was sufficient, Abraham very justly might have sacrificed Isaac. Let us therefore consider, without prejudice, whether it was or not: fairly taking the case, as it lies in Scripture.

There we find, that he had enjoyed the privilege of supernatural communications from God, for above the space of fifty years: during which time we have many of them recorded, and there might be many more. He had infallible assurance, that they were

true ones; not only from visible appearances of angels and of the divine glory, but from the punctual accomplishment of the predictions contained in them: particularly the destruction of Sodom, and the birth of Isaac, in his and Sarah's old age; events, which God alone could foresee, or bring to pass. And it was *after these things*, as Moses takes care to give notice expressly*, that he was tried with the command to offer up his son. Now surely by so long experience he was thoroughly qualified to distinguish real revelations from imaginary ones. Nor would God either permit the man, whom he honoured with the title of *his friend*†, to be misled into a horrible and most afflicting crime, by a delusion of Satan, attended with all the external marks of truth; or deliver a command to him of so extraordinary a nature, and leave him doubtful of its genuineness; but would certainly remove all possible difficulty about believing it, when those of obeying it were singly so hard to surmount. Indeed, an order, so strangely different from any that he had ever received, and which deprived him of the dearest blessing he had, must of itself put him on his guard, to the very utmost, against mistaking: however prepared he might be by the former mysterious dispensations of Providence, for future ones. That he loved Isaac most tenderly, no one can dispute; that he had a general tenderness of heart, his interceding for the vilest of sinners clearly proves: that his notions of God's moral attributes were just and lively, appears from his own words in his very intercession; *that the righteous should be as the wicked, that be far from thee: shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?*‡ And that he had any enthusiastic turn of

* Gen. xxii. 1. † 2 Chron. xx. 7. Isa. xli. 8. James ii. 23.
‡ Gen. xviii. 25.

mind, or any superstitious principles, that could induce him to think the offering up his son prescribed when it was not; or the voluntary perpetration of so shocking a deed an act of merit, that could procure him a compensation from Heaven for destroying his whole comfort and hopes at once: there is no shadow either of proof or likelihood. We never find him elsewhere attempting to sacrifice human victims. There had nothing remarkable of any sort befallen him, that could even seem to require one; much less so exceedingly precious a one: and the Heathens themselves did not offer up their sons, without being, as they thought, in the most urgent necessity and extreme danger. Indeed we are not certain, that there was in his time such a practice in the world: or, if there was, that he knew it. Or if he did; as we find it anciently denied*, and no where affirmed, that this execrable custom prevailed in his native country, probably his education must lead him to abhor it: and certainly the whole spirit of his religion was totally different from the bloody, as well as the lewd, idolatries and superstitions of Canaan.

Some indeed have suspected the contrary, because it is not said, that he expressed any surprize, or even reluctance, on receiving the command. But neither is it said, that he expressed any joy, when a countermand stopped his hand. Yet must he not of necessity, must not any man in like circumstances, be his religious opinions what they will, have felt both? And therefore why may not such things well be understood, without being related? And especially as to the former, what if the sacred historian drew a veil over agitations, too strong to be described: as the painter of a heathen story is said to have done, and is praised for doing it,

* Philo de Abrahamo, p. 27.

on the same occasion? Might not Abraham, notwithstanding this, feel the utmost agony of paternal fondness; beg of God to preserve him from illusion and error: beg, that, *if it were possible, this cup might pass from him:** yet, still, when the will of God, so far as he was capable of judging, appeared to be otherwise, acquiesce without expostulation. For Sodom, it is true, he did expostulate. But how different were the two cases? That was a charitable plea for others: this had been an interested one for himself. If Sodom was destroyed, all hope of repentance was cut off from a multitude of sinners: if Isaac suffered, it was not as a punishment; but as a trial, sure to end well. And therefore the former case called for intercession: the latter, for obedience only.

Having no room then to apprehend, that Abraham had any thing in his mind to mislead him; we can have none to doubt, but he examined such an order as this with the greatest circumspection, and yielded only to irresistible evidence of its being divine. Besides, it was not given him to be executed that moment, without leisure to recollect himself. Three days intervened before the time for the execution of it: and during all these his son was continually in his sight, going along with him to the place of sacrifice: nothing interrupted his attention to the horrors of this one dreadful subject. Full time was allowed for imagination to cool, for nature to work, for objections of every sort to be raised. Yet Abraham persevered: and therefore his conviction must be founded on proofs, that could not be shaken.

It might indeed appear strange to him, that God should mention no motive to an injunction so severe. But he would perceive immediately, that one motive

* Matth. xxvi. 39.

was the trial of his faith, which was tried more completely by assigning no other: and he would perceive afterwards, that no other could be assigned, because the intention of Heaven was that the deed should not be done.

Besides this lesser difficulty, there were, in point of reason, two principal ones. The first was, the unlawfulness of the action: and how that might be removed, I have shewn you. The other, to which the verse after the text refers, was the prediction, that *in Isaac his seed should be called:* that the holy nation, and the promised Messiah, should descend from him. For, it might be alleged, how could that be verified, if he was to be slain now? And yet, with whatever laws of human society God might dispense, he would certainly preserve his own truth inviolate. But in what manner Abraham answered this, the following verse informs us. *He accounted,* he reasoned, for so the word signifies, *that God was able to raise him up even from the dead: whence also he received him in a figure.* The birth of Isaac was like receiving him from the dead, on account of the age of both his parents. Yet when it was foretold, Abraham, to use the words of St. Paul, *considered not his own body, now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb,* but was *fully persuaded, that what God had promised, he was able to perform:** and the event justified his faith. Encouraged by this, he now a second time *against hope, believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations.*† For that power, which had quickened the barren aged womb, could also quicken the lifeless dust. It was only carrying on the same kind of wonderful interposition, that he had already seen begun. And thus did that very prediction, which

* Rom. iv. 19, 21. † Ver. 18.

might seem to create the most insuperable difficulty, afford him a clue to extricate him out of all difficulty, in point of argument intirely. For if Isaac was to have a posterity, he must be raised again: and that would vindicate the command of God, and the Patriarch's obedience, to all mankind.*

Some have observed a yet farther circumstance in the History; that God bade him *offer his son upon one of the mountains, which he should tell him of*†: and hence they conclude, not improbably, that when it is said, *he lift up his eyes the third day, and saw the place afar off*,‡ he might have known it by some remarkable sign from Heaven, pointing it out to him. And this would be a new and most seasonable confirmation, that he was doing what he ought. And supposing him at length to shew it Isaac too, it might well produce in him that entire submission to so strange a death, which may else look hardly credible. For he was unquestionably of age, to have attempted either resistance or escape, since he was of age to carry the wood for the sacrifice: yet he appears absolutely resigned; and seems to have been bound for no other reason, than because victims usually were. But still he might have yielded himself up, not in consequence of any immediate notification to him from above: but from mere dependence on his father's well known judgment and affection. It must have been from one of the two motives: and supposing it to be only from the latter and the weaker, it doth the highest honour to the characters of them both.§

* Neither Philo nor Josephus intimate, that Abraham reasoned thus. But the Author of *Nizzachon vetus*, in *Wagenseil*, p. 22. doth: who therefore probably borrowed this solution from the New Testament, or some Christian. † Gen. xxii. 2. ‡ Gen. xxii. 4.

§ Ισαακ μετα πεποιθησεως γινωσκων το μελλον ηδεως εγενετο θυσια. Clem. Rom. 1. Cor. §. 31.

But a further and very strong evidence of Abraham's acting by divine command, was that which appeared in the close of this wonderful transaction. If an evil and a lying spirit, if a gloomy turn of mind, if an emulation of any barbarous heathen rite, had prompted him to design this act; they would have prompted him also to complete the execution of it, and never have let him stop short just where he did. Nay, if these bad motives had influenced him, and in great mercy God had stopt him; he would surely at the same time have shewn him his error, instead of praising and rewarding him. And therefore his motives were not bad: but a wise and gracious Being was the author of the command, as well as the dispensation.

But to see this yet more fully, let us consider

III. The improbability of its producing any hurtful effect in after days.

Men may indeed run mad, and think Abraham's example authorises them to kill their nearest relation, or whom they will. And so they may run mad, and think the public good, or any thing else, authorises them. But that any one ever did plead the precedent of Abraham for such an action, I believe is not pretended. And plainly no one in his senses can. Abraham was a public and extraordinary person: he was a sovereign prince, and accountable to no power upon earth: he lived when divine revelations were frequent, had long been acquainted with the proper marks of them, and used to see them verified: his inclinations and his interest conspired in the strongest manner to preserve him from mistake: he knew by God's promise, that if he sacrificed his child by God's order, he would soon rise again: and at last he was not permitted to do, what merely for a trial,

he was commanded: nor hath any human creature ever been commanded it since. How can this possibly be encouragement to a private and common man; subject, he and his whole family, to the laws of the society, of which he is a member; born 4000 years after Abraham, in a quite different state of things; when no revelations are to be looked for, but all pretences to them suspected in the highest degree; who hath had no experience of them, nor can guess of what nature they should be, if there were any: how can he dream of encouragement from hence to commit a deed, contrary to the standing rules of his own reason, of human authority, and of the word of God, merely because he hath a strong inclination to it, perhaps to serve some selfish or wild purpose, that he hath at heart?

Still some have alledged that however plausibly we may argue, in fact human sacrifices began early in the world: and what could be so likely to give rise, or at least, countenance to them, as this command? But, according to some old accounts, they began before it. And suppose they did not; still, if any persons had either learned them, or been reconciled to them from hence, it must surely have been Abraham's posterity. And yet we do not find, that ever any one of them, excepting the single doubtful case of Jeptha 700 years after, so much as once thought of such an offering to the God of their fathers. It was idols only, that they worshipped thus; and they did it in imitation, not of Abraham, but of those very Canaanites, whom they had been ordered to destroy for their wickedness, and expressly forbidden to follow in this act of it. *Take heed to thyself, that thou inquire not, saying, how did these nations serve their gods?*

*Even so will I do likewise. For every abomination to the Lord, which he hateth, have they done: their sons and their daughters have they burnt in the fire to their gods.** Nor did the Canaanites alone, but nations, that probably had never heard of Abraham or of them, offer such victims. And therefore the custom seems altogether the offspring either of diabolical delusions, or of priestly tyranny, combined with gross ignorance and frantic terror; suggesting, that the most precious and most painful sacrifices must be the most efficacious. But had any ever supported themselves in this practice, by the history of Abraham, it must have been by the grossest abuse of that history: and every proceeding, every mercy of God, is liable to equal abuse. A command of such a nature, never given but once, and to one man, and then countermanded before execution, and clearly explained to be meant, neither for the averting of any danger, nor the expiation of any sin, but merely for an extraordinary trial of that man's dutifulness, could not in reality make the actual performance of the thing, so commanded, a common usage for quite different purposes: any more than Solomon's order for *dividing the child in two*† could make the performance of that a common usage. Indeed the directly contrary conclusion was the natural one: that God approved not human victims; but only such, as he had provided for Abraham, instead of his son. And if the computation of some chronologers be right, that, in a few years after this time, sacrificing men was abolished in that part of Egypt, which lay nearest to Abraham's residence; (where perhaps it was never taken up again) we shall have room to think the transaction, that we

* Deut. xii. 30, 31. † 1 Kings iii. 25.

are now considering, might have a most happy consequence, in that very respect, in which it is groundlessly accused of having a bad one.

But thus I am got insensibly into what I proposed to shew.

IV. The good ends, which might be, and were, promoted by it.

Indeed, could we discover none, we are just as ignorant of the design of several things in God's creation: which appear, though certainly without reason, both useless and hurtful. But in the present case many valuable purposes are visible and obvious.

This command was, in the first place, a noble manifestation of Abraham's faith and obedience. The hardest of those orders which he had received before, was very supportable: and they were accompanied with great promises of advantages; in particular of worldly advantage. This, on the other hand, was severe beyond expression; and had no promise or consolation at all annexed to it; but, instead of that, it enumerated to him the most cutting circumstances, and placed them before him in the fullest light. *Take now thy son, thine only son, Isaac, whom thou lovest, and offer him up.** Yet, pierced to the heart, as he must be, by these expressions, he dutifully submitted; without seeking excuses from any dissuasive reasonings, without throwing on any one the least share of the burthen of his own anguish; without exposing himself to the tender solicitations of Sarah; without acquainting Isaac what was intended, before it became absolutely needful. How astonishingly great, how composed, how considerate a self-denial was this!

Yet further, the piteous deed was not to be done immediately, whilst the impression of the divine voice

* Gen. xxii. 2.

was sounding fresh in his ears, and excluded every other sentiment; but at the distance of three whole days: during which every feeling of paternal affection would return in full force; and even the inferior consideration of what his family and the world would think, and say to so unnatural an action, if Isaac did not rise again instantly, as there was no proof he would, must singly have a weight very hard to be supported. Nor were these days to be spent in retirement, in meditation and prayer, to fortify his resolution; but altogether in the company of the dear object, whom he was to slay; whose conversation would be in a thousand instances the more moving, as he went along with him unsuspicious of what was to follow; and whose innocent question at last, *My father, behold the fire and the wood, but where is the lamb for a burnt offering,** must, one should think, have completed the melting down of all human resolution. But *wisdom preserved him,* as the book of Wisdom expresses it,† *blameless unto God, and kept him strong against his tender compassion towards his son:* till now, when the sacrifice of the mind was made to the utmost, and only the outward act was wanting, the *hand* being *stretched forth*‡ even for that; the goodness of the Almighty broke forth on a sudden, like the sun from behind a black cloud concealing it, *and the angel of the Lord called unto him out of Heaven, and said, lay not thine hand upon the lad: for now I know that thou fearest God, seeing thou hast not withheld thy son, thine only son, from me.*§ The transport of hearing these words must have made in a moment large amends from the preceding pangs. Isaac was restored to him without going through the

* Gen. xxii. 7. † Wisd. x. 5. ‡ Gen. xxii. 10.
§ Ver. 11, 12.

*bitterness of death :** reproach and misconstruction was avoided: the dreadful deed dispensed with: the willing mind accepted: and a solemn approbation pronounced over him from above, anticipating the final sentence, *Well done, good and faithful servant.*†

Indeed, before this, God hath declared, *I know Abraham.*‡ But now he knew him by a new proof: and, which is the constant Scripture sense of his trying any one, he manifested him by the trial, to angels, to men, to himself: *and experience wrought* in him sure *hope not be ashamed* upon any future occasion, *because the love of God was thus shed abroad in his heart.*§ A further discovery was, and a very delightful one it must be, that, by so decisive an experiment of Isaac's piety, his father knew him to be worthy of his utmost affection; and worthy of the choice, which God had made of him, to support religion, and be the progenitor of the promised seed.

Nor did this trial convey only improvement, and comfort, and reward here and hereafter, to Abraham: but useful instruction to others also. Hence it appeared, that the servants of the true Deity were as ready to perform his hardest commands, as those of false ones could be to obey theirs; but that he did not require of them to *give their first born for their transgression, the fruit of their body for the sin of their soul; but to do justly, and to love mercy, and walk humbly with their God.*‖ Hence also it appeared, that God was not partial in his choice of the Jews to be his peculiar people: but properly fixed on that nation, where the most illustrious instances of religious obedience had been given; for which this prerogative, granted them, was a fit recompence; besides that the

* 1 Sam. xv. 32. † Matth. xx. 21. ‡ Gen. xviii. 19.
§ Rom. v. 3, 4, 5. ‖ Mic. vi. 7, 8.

influence of such examples and teachers of it, afforded a greater probability of its lasting there, than any where else.

Hence likewise we may all of us learn, what is yet more material, not to fear making use of our reason in religion, for Abraham used his on the point before us; but still to make a sober and a modest use of it; to believe and do what we plainly see is taught and commanded, though neither the particulars of the doctrine, nor the grounds of the precept, be at all clear; and not to reject hastily and rashly what we read in Scripture concerning occasional directions given formerly from above, though it be difficult to account for some of them at present. We may learn further, that the *victory which overcometh the world is our faith;** but that we are to shew our faith by our works, † as St. James observes Abraham shewed his: ‡ not thinking our own pressures heavier, and our own virtue in bearing them greater, than any one's else ever were; but joining humility with resignation. And lastly, we may learn to obey God cheerfully in the most unwelcome injunctions, and trust him boldly in the most inextricable perplexities: which last we find was an ancient lesson, founded on this narration. For, from Abraham's saying to Isaac, *God will provide,* (in the Hebrew it is *see for*) *a lamb,* § the place received its name, *Jehovah jireh,* and a proverb its rise, *in the mount of the Lord it shall be seen:* ‖ that is, in the very extremity, if not before, provision will be made. And indeed, as this part of the Patriarch's history is recorded in the earliest book of the Bible; it is impossible to say, of how frequent use, or how great upon the whole, it may have been, from his own

* 1 John v. 4. † James ii. 18. ‡ Ver. 21.
§ Gen. xxii. 8. ‖ Ver. 14.

time downwards, to good persons in all ages of the Church, Jewish and Christian, under public afflictions and private. But evidently it may be of unspeakable benefit to us, if we set but our hearts to *walk in the steps of his faith,* * in hope of being *blessed with faithful Abraham,* † who is *the Father of all them, that believe.* ‡

Many however may still object, with too much truth, that his pattern, though they allow it to be an excellent one, is one that they could never follow, were they ever so plainly commanded. But then, be thankful at least, that you are not commanded: and be assured you never will. Admire and honour, but never think of blaming, him that was able to do so much; and by that method, amongst others, excite yourselves to do what you are called to. Since, through divine grace, he bore so amazing a trial, the same grace can surely strengthen you to bear common ones: and you may well submit contentedly, if your dearest blessing is taken from you, since he was willing to sacrifice his with his own hand; comforting himself, as you may too, by the full assurance of a future resurrection. *For if we believe, that Jesus died and rose again: them also, which sleep in Jesus, will God bring with him.* §

And this leads me to one view more of the sacrifice of Isaac: the resemblance it hath to that of Christ. No wonder it was so extraordinary a transaction in itself, if it was intended to prefigure the most extraordinary and mysterious one, that the world ever saw: as the agreeing circumstances prove it must. In both cases you see a good and kind father causing his beloved, only, and innocent son to suffer death. Isaac

* Rom. iv. 12. † Gal. iii. 6.
‡ Rom. iv. 11. § 1 Thess. iv. 14.

was heir to the promises of the temporal Canaan: through Christ we claim the inheritance of the heavenly. Isaac carried the wood, on which he was bound, in order to be offered up; * Christ carried the cross, † on which he was afterwards nailed, and put to death. The place where God appointed the former should die, and where the latter died actually, was the very same; *the land of Moriah,* ‡ that is, of God manifested; on one of the mountains of which, the temple stood; on another, our Saviour's cross. The term of three days too is remarkably specified in each history. § *The lamb,* which Abraham said, *God would provide,* ‖ naturally turns our thoughts to him, whom the Baptist calls the *Lamb of God;* ¶ and the

* Gen. xxii. 6. † John xix. 17.

‡ Gen. xxii. 2. 2 Chr. iii. 1. saith, the Temple was built on mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared to David. Joseph. Ant. l. 1. c. 13. §. 1, 2. saith, that Μωριον ορος where the Temple was afterwards built was the place where Abraham was directed to offer Isaac. The book of Cozri, p. 85. saith the same thing. Jerom. Qu. Heb. in Gen. xxii. 2. saith of the Hebrews in general, that they affirm it. Yet Tillotson, in the end of his Sermon on this text, mentions him, as saying from an ancient and constant tradition of the Jews, that Moriah was Calvary. But he specifies not the place. Reland Pal. p. 853. saith, "Mons Moria 2 Chr. iii. 1. "distingui omnino debet à Regione Moria, in qua Deus Montem "aliquem (erant enim plures in illa Regione) se Monstraturum "Abrahamo dicit, ubi filium suum offerat." But I think he doth not mention the land of Moriah elsewhere. Nor doth he explain here, whether he meant any more, than that the mountain was to be distinguished from the land, as a part from the whole. He saith, p. 854. that Moriah was a part of Sion, and p. 860. that Euseb. and Jerom in Onomastico place Golgotha to the north of Sion. And they do: but say nothing there of Moriah. Vitr. Obs. Sacr. l. 2. c. 10. §. 8. p. 397, 398. thinks the whole tract of country, in which Zion, Calvary, &c. were, was called the land of Moriah.

§ The following words are quoted from the ancient Jewish Book, Bereschith Rabba: *there are many spaces of three days in Scripture, one of which is the Resurrection of the Messiah.* It is not in the present copies: but probably was in the ancient. See Schoettg. de Messia, l. 6. c. 5. §. 5.

‖ Gen. xxii. 8. ¶ John i. 29, 34.

ram substituted for Isaac, * to the temple-sacrifices of animals, types of the atonement of Christ. Then lastly, the mountain, where provision was made for Abraham's distress, deserved its name infinitely better, on account of God's providing there for the redemption of mankind.

These things the Patriarch indeed could not understand, unless they were revealed to him: for the likeness of two objects cannot be discerned, till both appear. Perhaps he was told the intent, and thus *saw the day* of Christ *and was glad.* † How gracious an ending of so terrifying a dispensation! But however that were, we now may justly conclude, that what he then required Abraham to do for him, he had purposed from eternity, in the counsel of unsearchable wisdom, to do for his lost creatures. And, let the comforting reflection dwell with you, *He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?* ‡

* Gen. xxii. 13. † John viii. 56. ‡ Rom. viii. 32.

SERMON XXXV.

DEUT. xxix. 29.

THE SECRET THINGS BELONG UNTO THE LORD OUR GOD: BUT THOSE THINGS, WHICH ARE REVEALED, BELONG UNTO US AND TO OUR CHILDREN FOR EVER; THAT WE MAY DO ALL THE WORDS OF THIS LAW.

IT is one material consideration, amongst many, in favour of the Jewish and Christian Scriptures, that they preserve throughout so due a medium in the discoveries, which they make, of divine truths, as to direct the faith and practice of men without indulging their curiosity. The writings of enthusiasts would of course have been overrun with mysteries: and much fuller of explanations, that would make them still more obscure, than of the plain doctrines of piety and morals. Impostors would never have neglected to recommend themselves by doing us so singular a pleasure, as that of letting us into all the arcana of Heaven. Both would have entertained us, as they very safely might, with long and astonishing accounts of the essence of God, the orders and employments of invisible beings, of the counsels of Providence in the government both of them and us, of the particulars in which the future happiness and misery of man will consist. Now on the contrary, of these matters holy writ gives no other than brief, imperfect, general notices: and those merely in subservience to the far less

agreeable subjects, of our duties to God, each other, and ourselves.

Thus it delivers predictions of future events: not for the vain amusement of the inquisitive; but partly for direction, warning, or encouragement to particular nations and ages: partly to establish the truth of revelation, in all nations and ages, by their accomplishment. It contains also supernatural doctrines: but such only, as make the ground-work, more or less of our obligations, or our hopes. These it was evidently requisite for us to know: and accordingly they are notified to us: but without any art used to render the strangest of them plausible, or any care taken to gratify us with full information about them, or to shew us why it is withheld. The articles of belief are laid down with the utmost simplicity: our assent to them is required on the testimony of God: and when once we have been told enough to regulate our practice, we are only told farther, that *faith without works is dead.* * A grievous disappointment to our wishes undoubtedly: but still our reason must allow, that this is the proper conduct of the Lord of all to his creatures: and we find it to be his perpetual conduct from the beginning of the Bible to the end. What our corresponding duty is we are taught in several places; but no where so distinctly and fully, as in the text: which conveys as necessary instruction, to this day, as it did originally, though relating in part to different points. And happy would men always have been made, and happy might they become yet, by the observance of its rules. These are

I. That we should never pry into matters, which infinite wisdom hath concealed. For *the secret things belong unto the Lord our God.*

* James ii. 20.

II. That we should receive with attentive humility whatever it communicates. For *those things, which are revealed, belong to us and to our children for ever.*

III. That we should allow every divine truth its due influence on our behaviour. For we are to learn them, *that we may do all the words of this law.*

These are the maxims, which ought to be established in our minds, before we examine into any particular doctrine: and the previous thought, how particular doctrines will be affected by them, ought to be avoided, as far as is possible. They should be explained without partiality, embraced without jealousy, and their genuine consequences admitted, whatever they may prove to be.

I. That we should never pry into matters, which infinite wisdom hath concealed. For we shall seldom, if at all, be wiser for such inquiries: we shall never be happier or better: and we shall usually be more wretched, and less innocent.

In what reason or experience discovers to us, farther speculations or trials may produce new discoveries. But of articles depending on mere revelation, as we could have discerned nothing without it, we shall be able to discern very little, if any thing, beyond it. In the shortest and seemingly most obvious consequences, drawn concerning subjects, that lie naturally out of our reach, we must be exceedingly liable to mistakes: and venturing far into the dark, is the sure way to stumble. Another state may probably withdraw the veil, and acquaint us clearly and familiarly with what now perplexes our reasonings, and wearies our conjectures. Let us wait then contentedly for the time, which of necessity we must wait for: and apply to

ourselves the comfort, which our Saviour gave St. Peter on a different occasion, *What I do thou knowest not now: but thou shalt know hereafter.** Yet even then, truths will remain, the full comprehension of which must for ever be impossible, not only to us, but to the highest creatures of that Almighty Being, one of whose distinctions, inculcated in Scripture, is, *God only wise.*† His nature and attributes being unlimited, his works and providence reaching through immensity and eternity, the greatest advances of finite beings, must be infinitely distant from a complete understanding of them. *Canst thou by searching find out God? Canst thou find out the Almighty unto perfection? It is high as Heaven: what canst thou do? deeper than Hell: what canst thou know? The measure thereof is longer than the earth, and broader than the sea.*‡

But could inquiry add more to our knowledge, than it can: would it increase our happiness? We meet with difficulties, and should be glad of solutions: we enter a little way into a subject; see that vastly more lies behind, and earnestly long to be masters of it. But if we were so, are we at all sure, whether fresh doubts and questions, more embarrassing perhaps than the present, might not immediately arise from thence? We find it so in the visible world, where we had less ground to expect it. New facts are daily observed, new properties of bodies discovered, new deductions made from them: and what is the consequence? Why, that the scheme of things appears deeper and less fathomable, for every step we take in hopes of getting to the bottom of it. In all likelihood therefore the same is the case of the spiritual world

* John xiii. 7. † Rom. xvi. 27. 1 Tim. i. 17. Jude 25.
‡ Job xi. 7, 8, 9.

too: and, by knowing more of it, we should be farther from being satisfied than ever, if our satisfaction depends on knowing all. The system of religion is fully taught us by common reason, and the plain parts of Scripture. The defence of it is conducted most prudently by owning our ignorance where we are ignorant, which gives no advantages; whereas affectation of the contrary gives many. The practice of it consists, not in filling our heads with unnecessary speculations, but applying our hearts to necessary duties. The rewards of it are annexed to believing and doing what is required of us: and how can we be the better then for aiming at more?

Indeed we shall scarcely avoid being much the worse. By engaging in matters, of which we are unqualified to judge, we shall be in danger of judging materially wrong; either mistaking the nature, or even denying the truth of religion, like those of old, who, *professing themselves to be wise, became fools,** And the errors, into which we may thus fall, will be the less excusable, as they will proceed from our own rashness. Besides, the more intent persons are on pursuing their theories, the less time, and usually the less concern, they will have for performing their obligations: excepting, it may be, some fanciful ones, which they have built on their imagined discoveries: resembling those *worshippers of angels,* whom St. Paul charges with *intruding into things, which they had not seen, being vainly puffed up by their fleshly minds.*† Superfluous inquisitiveness is indeed sometimes accompanied with excessive diffidence: and then, though less criminal, it produces most tormenting anxieties. But commonly it proceeds from a degree of that irreverent vanity, which possessed our parent

* Rom. i. 22. † Col. ii. 18.

Eve, and cost mankind so dear, of invading such knowledge, as God hath reserved to himself, instead of acquiescing cheerfully in so much as he hath imparted.

Then with this undutiful spirit easily associates itself a still more mischievous one, of uncharitableness and spiritual tyranny. For when once men are assuming enough to determine, out of their own inventions, things, which their Maker hath not determined, the next natural step is, to *contend* for them far more *earnestly*, than for *the faith once delivered to the Saints*:* casting off Christian love, refusing communion or toleration, and too often renouncing common humanity, to all who differ from them. And therefore the Apostle gives Timothy, at the same time, these two directions: *Follow Righteousness, Charity, Peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure Heart. But foolish and unlearned questions* (and nothing is more *unlearned*, than disputing in the dark) *avoid; knowing that they do gender strifes.*†

On all accounts then we should keep close to plain reason and plain Scripture: let our assent be determinate, as far as they are undeniably so; but make no decision concerning what is doubtful, invent no groundless hypothesis to clear up what is obscure, nor carry on too long chains of argument from what seems the most evident. I conclude this head with that excellent advice of the son of Sirach. *Seek not out the things that are too hard for thee, neither search the things that are above thy strength. But what is commanded thee, think thereupon with reverence: for it is not needful for thee to see with thine eyes the things that are in secret.*‡ *Be not curious*

* Jude 3. † 2 Tim. ii. 22, 23.

‡ The Greek hath it, more briefly and expressively, thus: *For of the hidden things thou hast no need.*

*in unnecessary matters: for more things are shewed unto thee, than men understand. Many are deceived by their own vain opinion: and an evil suspicion hath overthrown their judgment. Without eyes thou shalt want light: profess not therefore the knowledge that thou hast not.**

II. The next rule, which Moses gives, is, that we should receive, with attentive humility, whatever infinite wisdom communicates to us. *For those things, which are revealed, belong to us and to our children for ever.*

Indeed let any proposition be delivered to us, as coming from God or from man, we can believe it no farther than we understand it: and therefore if we do not understand it at all, we cannot believe it all; I mean, explicitly: but only be persuaded, that it contains some truth or other, though we know not what.

Again, were any doctrine laid down, which we clearly saw to be self-contradictory, or otherwise absurd, that could never be an object of our faith. For there is no possibility of admitting, upon any authority, a thing for true, which we evidently perceive to be false. Nor would calling such doctrines mysterious mend the matter in the least. For indeed there is no mystery in them: they are as plain, as any in nature; as plainly contrary to truth, as any thing else is agreeable to it.

But if our assent be required to a proposition, which hath some meaning and no inconsistency in it, and is undeniably asserted in a revelation well proved: but only we have no other evidence for it; nor should of ourselves ever have imagined any such thing, indeed should have thought it very unlikely; and still cannot thoroughly comprehend it; or discover, or so much as

* Ecclus. iii. 21—25.

guess at, the reasons, the manner, the circumstances, of what we are taught: all this is absolutely no foundation for disbelieving it. Nay, though we should see difficulties and objections against it, which we could not particularly answer, we should allow them only their proper weight: which may be far overbalanced by the general attestations given of its divine authority.

For that God is able to communicate many important truths to us, which we have no means of knowing otherwise, concerning his own nature, his designs, and dispensations, concerning the inhabitants of the invisible world, and our future state in it, can no more be doubted, than whether we ourselves, according to our various knowledge of men and things, are able to give unexpected and serviceable notices, one to another. And that we should understand nothing farther of his secrets than is unfolded to us, nor be capable of answering many questions, that may be asked about them, otherwise than by confessing our ignorance, is so far from being a plea against their being really his, that it is a necessary consequence of it: so far from being strange in supernatural things, that it is common in natural ones. In several articles of revealed religion, we believe things of which we know not the manner or the reasons. But is it there alone, that we do so? In the whole of God's creation, what do we meet with, that is not, more or less, of the same sort? We know not the essence of our own mind, nor the precise distinctions of its several faculties: and why then should we hope to comprehend, or deny because we cannot comprehend, the personal characters, which, we are told, exist in the substance of the Godhead? We know not, how *the soul and flesh is one man:* what

wonder if we know not, how *God and Man is one Christ?** We are ignorant how the vicissitudes of day and night, summer and winter, are produced: how the fruits of the earth nourish us: how bodies cohere, or impel each other: how our several sensations are performed: how we move a hand or an eye, though it is our own doing. Familiar as these things are; the manner of them, when examined to the bottom, hath obscurities, which the most learned will never penetrate. *I beheld,* saith the preacher, *all the work of God,—that is done under the Sun. Though a man labour to seek it out, yet shall he not find it: yea farther, though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able.*† Surely then we may content ourselves to act in matters of faith, as in those of sense: and believe what we do understand, the thing itself in general; though many circumstances remain, which we understand not, and therefore are not required to believe any thing in relation to them.‡

Again: in the frame of nature and the scheme of Providence we discern indeed evident proofs of wisdom and goodness: but with innumerable particulars intermixed, which we perceive not to be all useful, or the creation any way the better for them. Yet we never think of excepting these from amongst the works of God: never doubt of their having a real, though unknown, subserviency to valuable ends. Why, just so in the Gospel-Revelation; look upon the general plan, and it is undeniably adapted to promote the divine honour, and human virtue and happiness: but how some points are conducive to them, we see less

* Ath. Creed. † Eccl. viii. 17.

‡ Ubi igitur aut qualis est ista mens? [divina] Ubi tua, aut qualis? potesne dicere? An si omnia ad intelligendum non habeo, quæ habere vellem; ne iis quidem, quæ habeo, mihi per te uti licebit? Cisc Tus. Disp. l. 28.

clearly, or perhaps not at all. Yet still, as they are parts of a system confessedly good, and clearly proved; and we cannot expect to comprehend all the secret connections and references in God's moral government of us, which extends to eternity, and may extend to worlds far out of our sight; it is unreasonable beyond expression, to refuse believing any thing, till we know the ground of every thing: and to deny that implicit faith to our Maker in some few instances, which we are obliged in so many to have in one another. Scornful rejection of doctrines, that have all the outward marks of his authority, merely because we cannot investigate the inward reasons or complete scheme of them, would be shocking irreverence in the highest of his creatures: and much worse doth it become our low rank of being, and the lamentable weakness of our degenerate faculties. *Hardly do we guess aright at things, that are upon earth; and with labour do we find the things, that are before us: but the things that are in Heaven, who hath searched out? And thy counsel who hath known, except thou give wisdom, and send thy Holy Spirit from above?**

Further yet: should a revelation contain assertions, that appear in themselves unlikely; and liable to objections, that we are at a loss how to solve: even this, though perhaps it might justly in certain cases, weaken our assent, yet would by no means be sufficient to prevent or destroy it. Some difficulties may perplex us, merely for want of the knowledge, that other men have. Some subjects, as far as we can judge, have difficulties on every possible supposition: which therefore, lying equally against all, cannot be urged against any one in particular: for something must be true.

* Wisd. ix. 16.

Many points, which our own reason proves to us, for example, concerning the attributes of God, natural and moral, are embarrassed with perplexities belonging to them, as hard to be unravelled, as any thing that Scripture teaches, on these, or any other heads. Indeed, whenever a finite mind hath an infinite object before it; or one, which, though limited, is too large for its grasp, the most accurate arguments upon it, will thwart one another. Throughout the material world are facts, of which, on proper testimony, we are very justly persuaded, though we cannot answer half the objections, that a subtle reasoner may bring against them. Concerning the free actions of our own minds, doubts have been raised, which, I believe, no man pretends he can remove. In the wisest conduct of any worldly affair, steps may be taken, for which they can never account, who are acquainted with it only in part. And surely much less ought we to think of having the nature and the ways of God brought down to our poor apprehensions. Not that every seeming difficulty in religion, or in revelation, is a real one. Some persons have made things darker, than they are: others have wanted to make them clearer, than they can be: and between them, unmeaning words, and unwarrantable notions, have been added to those of Scripture: which hath thus been charged with what it never meant to say. But we own, after these mistakes are rectified, there will be room for plausible suggestions against some of its doctrines. And they should neither be dissembled on one hand, nor exaggerated on the other: such weight as they have, when those abatements from it have been made, which the considerations now mentioned to you require, should be fairly allowed them. But then the various evi-

dences of the gospel should be allowed their weight also: and whoever doth that honestly, will never reject it, or any article of it.

Some indeed, who are far from rejecting it on the whole, fancy however, that they do it service by interpreting the mysterious parts of it in such a manner, as will reduce them to the level of our conceptions: and so are free in wresting holy writ from its obvious meaning, to fix upon it what they deem a more rational one. Now certainly a single expression, or even a number of scattered expressions, must not always be taken in the most rigid sense. The nature of the thing, the genius of the language, the custom of the writer, his context, the general scope of his doctrine, and of theirs with whom his may be fitly compared, in short, all just rules of judging ought to be called in, to settle the import of any difficult passage: and nothing more built on a few words, than can be well supported; especially no article, that is at once of great consequence and improbable. But still there is an opposite extreme, too frequent, and very dangerous, of explaining things away. The sacred authors are not to have a forced construction put upon them, to make them suit our notions the better: but we must examine impartially what they really deliver; and take it as it is, with the difficulties belonging to it. For though the attempt of altering the scheme of revelation, in order to defend it, may be a well-meant officiousness, it is an irreverent, an unjustifiable, and will be an unsuccessful one. Giving up as indefensible, what is truly scriptural, is so far casting off Scripture: and unbelievers will refute our interpretations, and take advantage of our concessions: whereas, keeping close to the plan of God's word, we need not fear maintaining our ground. The disputed

articles were doubtless made parts of it for wise motives: for many, in all likelihood, which we see not; and for some, which we do see. Our life on earth is a state of trial. Many things try, how we conduct our affections: why may not some be placed in our way for the moral exercise of our understandings? Thus we shall have an opportunity of shewing, whether, on the one hand, we will idly neglect employing our reason at all, or, on the other, presumptuously exalt it against our Maker; or whether, avoiding both errors, we will carefully use our own faculties, and duly respect his omniscience. By adhering to this medium, the first christians preserved the doctrine of the Gospel in such purity, that Irenæus writes concerning them thus. *Neither will the most able man, who presides in the Church, say other than this: (for no one is above his master): nor the weakest diminish any thing from what hath been delivered. For the faith being one and the same; neither he, that can say much about it, adds to it; nor he, that can say little, takes away.**

III. The last rule, implied in the text, is, that we should allow every divine truth its due influence on our behaviour. For we are to learn them, *that we may do all the words of this law.*

Indeed merely *receiving the truth in the love of it* † is a moral act: and in some cases may be one of great virtue. Whence our Saviour saith to St. Thomas; *Blessed are they, that have not seen, and yet have believed:* ‡ blessed in proportion to the integrity of their judgment, not the positiveness of their persuasion. But scarce will it be found, that any article of faith is proposed for the probation of this only. Each hath its practical consequences, either flowing of ne-

* Iren. l. 1. c. 3. al. 10. † 2 Thess. ii. 10. ‡ John xx. 29.

cessity from it, or built with propriety upon it. In proportion as we *know God*, we are to *glorify him as God:* * according to every particular, which the Scripture hath manifested concerning him. And the several obligations, incumbent on us, towards him, ought not to be estimated, however commonly they are, by their influence on the affairs of our present life, but by the stress, which he, who alone knows the proper one, hath laid upon them. Our performance of these obligations, as it was the true motive to the delivery of each article, is the just measure of our belief in it. If we know enough of the mysterious doctrines in religion, to fulfil those duties, of which they are each respectively the foundation, our knowledge, however imperfect, is sufficient. And if those duties remain unfulfilled, the completest knowledge will not avail us. Nor indeed will the completest practice of such duties alone: for we must *do all the words of* God's *law:* † and the plainer any part of it is, the less excusable the neglect of it will be. Our first and most evident, and therefore strongest obligations are to the dictates of our inward nature. Other things are necessary for such as have the means of being acquainted with them. But these lie within the reach of all men; and all should observe them preferably to whatever can be matter of dispute. Living agreeably to clear rules is the method for obtaining light into those, which are obscure. For *if any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God:* ‡ whereas it is no wonder, that they, who *put away a good conscience, concerning faith make shipwreck.* § Or however orthodox any man's belief may

* Rom. i. 21.
† Deut. xxvii. 26.
‡ John vii. 17.
§ 1 Tim. i. 19.

be, if his life be bad, as he fails in one essential part of answering the design of the Gospel, he must fail of the rewards, and incur the punishments of it.

But, though every instance of Christian behaviour will be indispensably required of those who make profession of Christianity: yet one deserves particular mention, since the Apostle hath mentioned it particularly in relation to the present subject. *Though I understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and have all faith,—and have no charity, I am nothing.** Now this virtue is a very comprehensive one: but so far as it belongs peculiarly to the matter before us, it consists in disposing us to gentle treatment of those who differ from us in points of speculation, and of consequent practice; especially when such points are either doubtful in themselves, or perplexed by the arts of controversy, or when men are unfitted by involuntary prejudices to judge rightly concerning them. We must indeed think as we apprehend reason and Scripture to direct us, both of the importance of things, and the conduct of men. On proper occasions too our opinion must be declared. We are by no means to acknowledge, either in our words or actions, those for sound believers, whom we conceive not to be such: nor to shew indifference about doctrines, which appear to us of moment to the salvation of mankind. Errors may proceed from as blameable a temper, and produce as mischievous effects, as the grossest immoralities. And we may deem and pronounce a man's condition to be dangerous on account of his errors: yet have the truest good-will and compassion for him; nay, and the highest regard in other respects.

* 1 Cor. xiii. 2.

But if we are hasty in suspecting, or unfair or only rigorous in interpreting, vehement or artful in censuring, or inwardly pleased with thinking harshly: then begins that inhuman sin of uncharitableness; against which we ought to guard ourselves, by recollecting every circumstance, that can make in favour of our brethren. Sometimes men appear to differ, when they do not: or to differ much more widely, than they do: their expressions vary strangely, and perhaps are quite opposite; when, had they but coolness and clearness enough to understand one another, they mean, at least very nearly, the same thing. And this consideration should induce us to interpret with candor the words of those, who may appear to depart from the established doctrines: but then surely they in return ought to interpret with at least equal candor the forms, in which the established doctrines are, and long have been, professed in the Church of Christ. But farther: though a person may be in a palpable error, possibly it may be such, as no exceedingly bad consequences will attend: or though the article be important, it may not be essential. Or, however fundamentally he may err in one point, he may agree with us in all or most others; nay, be as zealous for them, as we are: and some kind notice ought to be taken of that.

Besides, let his errors reach to ever so many and material points; yet, to make him personally criminal in any considerable degree, he must not only have had such means of information, as are, strictly speaking, sufficient; but his rejection of those means, or failure of being influenced by them, must have arisen from a worse cause, than mere human fallibility, or such inattention and prepossession, as are incident to the better sort of minds. For when these alone mislead

him, he hath good ground surely for an humble hope, that his gracious Maker will not impute to him for sin, the faults of which he was ignorantly guilty. Still the mistakes, even of such a one, may be greatly detrimental to society, to virtue, to religion: and therefore the public warning of general denunciations against them, may both be useful and requisite, and such denunciations are far from deserving to be condemned as uncharitable. But then they must be understood, like most other general expressions, with due limitations. And before we can apply them to particular persons, there are so many unknown circumstances to be taken into the account, and so many allowances to be made, which, without seeing into the heart, cannot be made justly, that the rational, as well as Christian, rule is, not to *judge another man's servant.* Our concern is, to believe and act right ourselves: as for those around us, *to their own master they stand or fall,* and we should be very backward to cast those out, whom perhaps *God will receive.* * Or however bad an opinion we may conceive any peculiar aggravations oblige us to entertain of their future condition in the next world; or however necessary we may judge it *after a first and second admonition to reject* † them from communion with us; we are bound by the most sacred ties, neither to do them any private, nor procure them any public, injury or hardship; but use them with all possible prudent mildness and tenderness: which is likely to reclaim them if any thing can; and should it not, they will surely remain objects of pity, as well as dislike.

These are the rules, which plainly suit our present state of imperfection. And may the careful observa-

* Rom. xi. 3, 4. † Tit. iii. 10.

tion of them bring us all safely to a better: wherein, *that which is perfect being come, that which is in part shall be done away. For now we see through a glass darkly; but then face to face: now we know in part; but then shall we know as also we are known. And now abideth Faith, Hope, Charity, these three: but the greatest of these is Charity.* ‡

* 1 Cor. xiii. 10, 12, 13.

END OF VOL. II.

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